

FEED MY LAMBS:  
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LIVING INTO THE  
BIBLICAL IMPERATIVES OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION

A THESIS

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SCOTT M. HARDING

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To the Vestry & Congregation of The Church of the Messiah:  
for their love, support, and encouragement.

## CONTENTS

List of Figures	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter One: Unless a Seed Dies	1
Chapter Two: It is Easier for a Camel	13
Chapter Three: Mercy, Not Sacrifice	27
Chapter Four: Hurry and Come Down	42
Chapter Five: Be Not Afraid	61
Chapter Six: Members of the Body	75
Chapter Seven: A Wise Man Builds on the Rock	87
Chapter Eight: You Give Them Something to Eat	100
Chapter Nine: Man Does Not Live on Bread Alone	114
Chapter Ten: And the Word Became Flesh	127
Chapter Eleven: Remaining in the Vine	142
Appendix 1: Casting the Vision	148
Appendix 2: Log Sheet	153
Appendix 3: Door Hangers	154
Appendix 4: Brochures	155
Appendix 5: Yearly Calendar	158
Appendix 6: Visiting Team Responsibilities	160
Appendix 7: Sample Worship Bulletins	162
Appendix 8: Lectionary of Bible Readings for Worship Service	165
Bibliography	171
Vita	176



## FIGURES

Figure 7.1 The Vision of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry	92
Figure 8.1 Importance of Fellowship Dinner to the Vision and Spiritual Health of Messiah	101
Figure 8.2 The Vision of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry	102
Figure 8.3 Interdependence of the Elements of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry	103
Figure 8.4 Number of Meals Served Per Year	104
Figure 8.5 Frequency of Donations to the Food Pantry	112
Figure 9.1 Average Sunday Attendance at Worship Service	118
Figure 10.1 Percentage of Donations to Fellowship Dinner Ministry of Those Surveyed	140
Figure 10.2 Importance of Fellowship Dinner to the Vision and Spiritual Health of Messiah	140

## ABSTRACT

This thesis-project is a case study of the Fellowship Dinner ministry of The Church of the Messiah in Glens Falls, NY. In the spring of 2005 the congregation began a journey to transition from serving a Sunday afternoon community meal into creating a Sunday evening ministry, which involved: serving dinners to the community, creating a worship service targeted to the un-churched, and increasing the present food pantry. This project traces the path of this transition through the formation of leadership teams; and evaluates the ministry and the parish in the present.

## CHAPTER ONE

### UNLESS A SEED DIES

The Church of the Messiah<sup>1</sup> is a striking, gray-stoned structure in the heart of the city of Glens Falls, New York. The church was constructed in gothic-style architecture in the 1850's and its steeple and bell tower rises far into the heavens. On Sunday morning one looking at the church would see a constant flow of activity with people coming in and going out to worship, as one service ends and another begins. But on Sunday afternoon, one would barely notice the church, because all of the focus is taking place directly across of the street in front of the church's Parish House. Around four in the afternoon a group begins to gather around the stairs outside of the double doors. They talk, laugh, and smoke outside of the building as they wait for the doors to be opened. This group is a diverse mix of personalities and ages and backgrounds. Some are homeless,<sup>2</sup> some poor or unemployed, some have chemical dependencies, some are mentally impaired, some are just lonely, but nearly all have personally felt the impact of poverty. Our society casts the stereotypical homeless person as a middle-aged male, but the group gathered is filled with young people in their twenties, men and women of all ages, and many children.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Church of the Messiah is a congregation in the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Albany.

<sup>2</sup> Homelessness has been defined by the federal government as "an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" this includes those whose nighttime residency is in shelters, transitional housing, institutions for the mentally ill, and motels. "General Definition of Homelessness Individual," United States Code Title 42, Chapter 119, Subchapter I. The homelessness that most affects our region are those who the county shuffles from motel to motel.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this writing, over the past month we have served over a dozen different children under the age of ten, and there are currently five pregnant teens attending regularly.

Inside the doors one can smell the aromas of Sunday dinner being prepared. The scent of chicken or pork being cooked, the richness of spaghetti sauce simmering on the stove, or, occasionally the smell of a freshly baked cake<sup>4</sup> greets you as you enter the building. These dinners are being prepared by one of the eight teams comprised of parishioners of The Church of the Messiah, who along with several outside churches and organizations, ensure that this dinner is served each and every Sunday evening at six o'clock. They hustle and bustle around the kitchen, stacking trays, wrapping silverware, buttering bread, and a myriad of other small tasks that must be completed before the dinner can be served. However, this does not stop the chatter and laughter of fellowship, which flows continuously throughout their preparation.

Meanwhile, the group outside the doors has multiplied and when the doors are unlocked at a quarter to five they enter in a wave, heading straight for Schuyler Hall.<sup>5</sup> The hall is a large room set up with a dozen round tables for seating. There is coffee, tea, and pastries<sup>6</sup> set up on a table against the wall on the near side of the room. Everyone helps themselves to the goodies and finds a place at the round tables where the conversations that were taking place outside now resume. In addition to the food and beverages in front of the people, at each place rests a small spiral book. These are the worship books for the five o'clock service. They are placed in a bin on a small table and each person takes one as they enter the hall. On the table in front of the room rests a small wooden tabernacle, which holds the communion bread and wine and the holy oil for

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<sup>4</sup> One team always makes a freshly baked cake or brownie for dessert and it is mouth-watering when walking into the building.

<sup>5</sup> Schuyler Hall was named for the fifteenth rector of the church, The Reverend Schuyler Jenkins.

<sup>6</sup> We are fortunate to be recipients of the Saturday leftovers from our local Pancra bakery.

anointing. A stool sits next to the table and a microphone is positioned in front of the stool. Around five o'clock the minister takes his place on the stool, the musicians take their place in the corner near the piano and the service begins with the relaxed call to order of "what are we singing tonight?"

The people call out song numbers from the worship book. "Four, Thirty-seven, Two, Twenty-eight!!!" can be heard as the requests are made. Four or five praise and worship songs begin the service, and serve as an opportunity not only to worship the Lord, but provide a welcoming and non-threatening atmosphere for those who stroll in a little late. This is followed by congregational prayers, a reading from scripture, normally read by a member of the community and a short sermon. All of this takes place while being seated, except when people get up to get more coffee or go back outside to smoke or perhaps skip the sermon.<sup>7</sup> More singing follows the sermon, followed by the "Peace" being shared. During this time the ministers and congregation travel throughout the room welcoming one another and shaking hands and traveling from table to table greeting those who have chosen to remain seated. This leads into a time of Holy Communion, where each week the congregation is invited to receive the sacraments of the bread and wine, representing Christ's body and blood. A line forms and snakes around the room, as the people step forward to receive the Lord's Supper. During this time of Communion, more songs are called out by the congregation and sung, the minister anoints with oil those who come forward, and a prayer team moves from table to table offering to pray for

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<sup>7</sup> Shocking, I know that people would deliberately get up and leave during the sermon, only to conveniently come back when it was over. This does not actually bother me, although it bothers some of our regular parishioners, who attend the service. I wonder how many parishioners would actually like to do this on Sunday mornings, if not for the major social faux pas that this would create within their peers.

individuals. Throughout the evening, the service becomes more and more crowded as the dinner time approaches.<sup>8</sup> When the team has finished praying for all who desired prayer, one final song is sung, the minister gives the final blessing, and immediately the next phase of the evening begins. Some race to line up for dinner, others go back outside to let people know the service is finished, and others begin to sift through the clothing in the Good Shepherd Clothes Closet.

Meanwhile, the team in the kitchen is putting the finishing touches on everything. The salt and pepper shakers are placed on the tables. The tabernacle, stool and microphone are put away. The drinks have been poured and are laid out in rows for people to help themselves. The desserts have been sliced or portioned onto plates. A serving line has been organized so that the main course, potato, and vegetable can be given quickly and orderly. There is a nervous energy as everyone moves into their places waiting for the moment where “grace” is said and the people begin filing through the kitchen “cafeteria-style.”

Outside the kitchen the line for the dinner has almost doubled.<sup>9</sup> They too, are awaiting the moment that “grace” is said and the doors are opened. And, at last that moment arrives. And before the echo of “amen” subsides, the door is opened, dinner is served, and the line begins moving. The parishioners of Messiah hang back, making sure

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<sup>8</sup> While we do not have many “rules” concerning behavior during the service, our one highly enforced rule is that all are welcome into the service before dinner, but if one does not wish to participate in the service she must wait outside until the service is completed. There can be no gathering in the hallway waiting for the dinner to be served. This means that there are often people coming throughout the service and sitting in the hall so as to be inside, especially in January in Upstate New York.

<sup>9</sup> Consistently, the number of people who attend the service make up 40-60% of those who attend the dinner. This has proven very helpful in gauging serving sizes or making more food.

there is enough food, and welcoming those who have arrived late. Everything moves with such efficiency that within ten minutes everyone has received their first serving. The hall does not sound much different from a school cafeteria; it is booming with chatter and there is the constant sound of the moving of chairs and placement of trays. There is a great deal of interaction between the team and those who come to the dinners, especially the regulars who attend week after week. After everyone has been served, they begin mingling or offering the remainder of the desserts throughout the hall.

Only fifteen minutes into the dinner, more activity takes place as the Food Pantry opens. A line begins to form along the far wall of the hall as people gather to select items from within. Each week a person is permitted to choose five or six items, depending on stock, from within the pantry. These are non-perishable items such as canned vegetables, fruit, stew, spaghetti, tuna, peanut butter, cereal etc. These items have all been donated from the parishioners of Messiah, and on average one hundred twenty items are given away each week. By the time the Food Pantry is closed many of the tables are empty. The team and many members of the community help clean up. In the hall the garbage is collected; the tables are wiped down; the chairs are stacked. In the kitchen the team is hard at work cleaning and doing dishes. And nearly as fast as the hall was full, it is now vacant. There is still some fellowship taking place outside within the community but within a few minutes everyone has said their good-byes and good-nights and gone their separate ways.

This scene, with some minor variances, has been repeating itself week after week for over six years. For the people of the community it provides a nutritious meal, some extra food and clothing, and an opportunity to gather in worship and fellowship. For most of the team members, who take part in the Fellowship Dinner Ministry it has become much more. They see this as the defining ministry of the vision at Messiah. They see this as our responsibility as the people of God to address the needs of poverty in our area. They look forward to their time to come and to serve. They enjoy the camaraderie within their team and the relationships they have developed with the people of the community. For many of them this simply is fun.<sup>10</sup>

This has not always been the case.

Like many churches, The Church of the Messiah occasionally would gather a team, prepare a meal, and serve at a local soup kitchen. This particular soup kitchen was located just around the corner from The Church of the Messiah and was called the Open Door. The Open Door was open every day of the week except Tuesday, when the local Salvation Army provided meals, and Sunday. For years the parish had sent teams to help serve at the soup kitchen. But in 1995 the previous Rector of the parish, the Rev. William Cooper, decided to fill the gap to make sure that members of the community would have a place to eat each day of the week.<sup>11</sup> And so, the parish began serving a “Community Meal” after the 10 AM service every Sunday. This ministry was subsidized by the government to the extent that we were able to purchase food from the local food bank. This meant that we were also accountable to higher government standards in health code,

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<sup>10</sup> These comments came directly from the team members themselves.

<sup>11</sup> This actually began as a monthly meal, but remained so for only a brief time before the Rector announced that it would be weekly.



occupancy, kitchen inspection, and all of the team members had to attend classes to be certified at the Department of Public Health.<sup>12</sup> As restrictive as these standards were, they were minor annoyances compared with the imperative regulation that all food served must be prepared “on-site.” This did not only include the main course, such as chickens or pot roasts, but simple things like cupcakes or cookies to be served for desserts. This created quite a hardship for the team members, as it meant either missing church services in order to prepare the Sunday meal or spending a good part of their Saturday at church in the kitchen. Neither option was really optimal for them. It also produced one of the first detours away from the original vision, which was to gain the involvement of local congregations inside and outside of our own denomination. Because of both the time of the meal and the government standard that all food had to be prepared in our kitchen, we had only one other church willing to partner in this ministry. No other church was willing to send a team who would give up its own Sunday morning worship in order to cook and prepare the meal. Neither could a church simply show up to serve a meal that was cooked beforehand in their homes, because it had to be prepared in its entirety on-site.

From the moment that I arrived at the parish, in January 2004, it was evident that conflict surrounded this ministry. I had assumed it was for many of the obvious reasons—parishioners not wanting to associate with the caliber of people who would come to a meal such as this, the presumed loss of community that occurred with the elimination of the fellowship hour after church, and the money that was spent on the cost of meals and the extra staff. And while there was a group who felt this way, I came to

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<sup>12</sup> This Public Health program made a definite impact, as even sixteen years later, everyone still remembers (not fondly) this course.

learn that they were a vocal, but fairly small minority.<sup>13</sup> However, there was not a true sense of conflict coming from this group, but rather a feeling of resignation. They did not embrace this ministry with enthusiasm, but neither did they actively fight against it. They seemed to have come to a place where the Community Meal ministry and the sacrifices that came along with it were merely tolerated.

After some digging I discovered that the true conflict was actually coming from within the leadership and the teams that prepared the meals. We had five or six teams (depending on who was counting), which took turns rotating and preparing the meals.<sup>14</sup> The teams had remained mostly intact from the beginning and on two of the teams the members were all over seventy years of age. The teams were becoming tired with many of them becoming agitated that more people were not helping. A couple of teams began to disappear to Florida over the winter, as will happen as they age (at least in Upstate New York). There was also the reality that the people in leadership in this ministry were also in leadership in other areas; they were stretched thin—and as often happens, the “it is just easier to do it myself” mentality can take over. In fact, after some observation I began to recognize that the true conflict seemed to be that serving at the Community Meal had become a duty or chore instead of the joy and blessing of serving people in the name of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Of these three issues: associating with the poor, cost, and loss of fellowship hour, the largest complaint had to do with missing fellowship hour after church.

<sup>14</sup> This was one of the major tipping points alerting me that we were reaching a crisis level. Although there were still officially six teams, many recalled when there were more. And they wanted the rotation to remain as such. This created several gaps, especially when one team disappeared for the winter. I began noticing that two of the teams were filling in for each of those absences week after week. And they were growing very weary—for good reason.

The initial solution to this problem was to place pressure on me to enlist more of the “younger people” to be on a team. I struggled with this in a few ways. First, why me? This is one of the few ministries that has existed and been successful outside of the direct participation of the priest. What would be the long-term benefit of me flying in like Superman to fix everything, even if I could? Secondly, I knew there had been several people throughout the years who offered to join a team or who volunteered to help serve, but they were rarely taken up on these offers. Except, of course, in those rare emergency situations where a last minute substitute was needed. Occasionally these people were recruited to prepare and serve the entire meal, without ever having been a part of a team to see how the Community Meal functioned.<sup>15</sup>

Most importantly, I felt that this ministry was in need of a new vision in order to survive. The time for little tweaks and alterations was long past. The Community Meal Coordinator was responsible for ordering all of the food from the Food Bank, having it picked it up, having it unloaded and stored, reporting on its usage and how many meals were served, making sure the kitchen was stocked with paper products and other essentials, recruiting and training the teams, and for finding substitutes and replacements when teams were unavailable!!! No wonder there was burn-out. No wonder that additional people were not being recruited to serve on teams. No wonder there was a crisis. This is not a ministry that one person or even just a few can run alone—it is amazing that it has lasted this long! It had reached the point where radical change was needed. If God did not breathe new life into this ministry it would soon die a slow painful

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<sup>15</sup> One of the striking differences in reading past annual reports from the Community Meal was the how often the number of teams would vary from year to year. From five to six, back to five. It was often inconsistent.

death. The good news is that we have a God of Resurrection. As Jesus said, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)<sup>16</sup> At this point I believed that a radical change would be necessary. In order for new life to spring forth out of the Community Meal, this ministry would have to die to itself.

As I began to pray about the future of this ministry, especially within the scope of death and resurrection, I sensed that God was giving us a choice about the new life that would emerge. The first choice was to celebrate ten years of a glorious ministry of outreach and service. All ministries and visions have a life-cycle and perhaps the time had come for us to celebrate the past and begin to seek God for a new vision and direction that He was preparing for us. The second choice was to invite The Church of the Messiah to make a greater investment in those we served and in addressing the issue of poverty alleviation. We offered a lunch after our Sunday morning service. This was good. The Church is called to feed the poor and hungry. But is that enough? Should we do more? Are we just called to invest more financially? How about spiritually? How do we feed people the good news of Jesus Christ as well? A few come to our services, but many more do not. How about emotionally? Are we called to develop relationships with the people we encounter? Is the lack of relationship one of the reasons people were burning out? <sup>17</sup> How do we have a greater impact on the lives of the people in our

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<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the quoted verses are from the English Standard Version of the *Holy Bible*.

<sup>17</sup> I have experienced several instances and have heard countless others where outreach efforts fizzle out because there is a disconnect between themselves and those to whom they are reaching out. This was never more evident than seeing a tremendous drop in interest of going and serving the homeless, which we did in a previous church I served 3 or 4 times a year. The first few times we had tons of people willing to go, but became a struggle to get anyone after a year or so.

community we are serving and at the same time revitalize our teams and ultimately our parish? These were some of the questions we were going to need to answer if indeed we were going to move forward. But even after we were able to answer all of those questions the larger question loomed—do we want to make this sort of investment?

Let us be honest, one of the challenges all churches and Christian organizations face is that it is difficult to quantify the return on our investment. Hiring a youth minister (even a highly successful one) does not translate into teenagers flocking to church, bringing along their parents, who soon will come to know the saving grace of Jesus, and more importantly, the joy of tithing. A church may never see a positive monetary investment from this ministry, but how do you quantify the effect that comes from such a ministry? How much is someone's first spoken prayer in a group worth? How much is a Bible Study where youth are learning God's Word worth? How much is someone coming into a relationship with Jesus worth? It makes the cost-analysis of our limited resources challenging. Jesus speaks plainly that we are not to be focused on laying up treasures on earth, but to lay treasures up in heaven, where they will not be destroyed;<sup>18</sup> effectively saying that spiritual wealth trumps financial wealth every time. But even this can be challenging. As Jesus tells his disciples, they are benefitting from the work of those who came before them, and they are reaping the harvest that others have labored to sow.<sup>19</sup> This reality flies smack into the face of our culture of instant gratification where there is little for which people need to be patient. You can learn the world's news in a matter of minutes on the internet; you can reach nearly anyone by email, cell phone, text message,

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew 6:19-20.

<sup>19</sup> John 4:37-38.

Twitter, or Facebook in seconds; you can buy whatever you desire with the click of a button and receive it on your doorstep within a week.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, through this passage Jesus teaches that our work and ministry may not only fail to reap immediate benefits, or benefits in a few years, but ones that we ourselves may never experience! Again—were we willing to risk making that kind of investment?

In the spring of 2005, during forty days of the Easter season<sup>21</sup> leading up to Pentecost we decided it was time to answer these questions. As a church we talked, listened, fasted, and prayed: seeking the Lord's guidance and direction. The following chapters recount the transformation of both a ministry and a church when it decided to take the risk of embracing the power of the living God and committing to praying daily:

Lord Jesus Christ, you said that 'unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit.' Help us, Lord to put aside our own desires and to seek your vision for Messiah and the Community Meal so that we will bear much fruit for your holy kingdom. Give us a heart for the poor, the destitute, the neglected, and those broken in body and spirit so that we may meet their needs not only physically, but spiritually. Through your tender mercies sake, we pray. *AMEN.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I recently sold an item on eBay, shipping it out on Monday. We are so used to this immediate gratification (and a near perfect Postal system) that the buyer contacted me on Thursday wondering where the item was. Perhaps, more telling is that I was also shocked it had not arrived yet, and after typing in the tracking number informed him that it was due to arrive the next day.

<sup>21</sup> These are the days between Easter and Pentecost.

<sup>22</sup> This prayer was prayed at every service during this season, and also printed and distributed on business cards in order for people to pray every day throughout the forty days.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL

As an important and vital part of answering the question about increasing our investment in the Community Meal ministry we must investigate the biblical and theological foundation of feeding the hungry or caring for the poor. While much of the focus of this ministry is in feeding those who are hungry, many of the passages that will be examined concern the broader definition of those who are poor. This is acceptable considering I believe that it is impossible to separate hunger from poverty—they go hand in hand. And while hunger is certainly not the only issue that those who are poor must face, nearly all who are poor face the issue of hunger. Even in times of famine those who are wealthy are able to travel to foreign lands and purchase food. This is the story of how Joseph's brothers and ultimately the nation of Israel ended up in Egypt. They went down to buy food. Jacob was blessed financially by God, and the ability to purchase food from a foreign land.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Scriptures those who are hungry are characterized by other terms to describe people cast off and marginalized in society—the poor, the needy, the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed, to name a few.<sup>2</sup> In looking at the Biblical framework surrounding poverty we must start by examining the relationship that God has with the poor.

God loves and is a champion for the poor. Psalm 12:5 reads, "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the LORD; "I will

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 42-46.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce C. Birch, "Hunger, Poverty, and Biblical Religion," *The Christian Century* (June 11, 1975): 593.



place him in the safety for which he longs.” This is where God begins his work in the world. Again and again, he begins with those who are oppressed by sin, greed, and corruption. Indeed this is the heart of the story of the Exodus. The nation of Israel enslaved by Pharaoh cries out to the LORD, and the LORD comes to their redemption.<sup>3</sup> He sends Moses and Aaron as his ambassadors to Pharaoh to demand release for his people that they might serve him. God sent forth plagues and miracles to demonstrate his power, authority and love for his people, until finally Pharaoh relented by setting them free. Of course, even this was short-lived as Pharaoh regretted this decision and sent his armies after Israel. But God still delivered his people through the Red Sea and destroyed the army of Egypt. He rescued and redeemed them and brought them into a land of milk and honey.<sup>4</sup> Even as awesome as the Exodus was, it is more than just the redemption of God’s people. It is the correction and reestablishment of God’s plan for the world.

Out of the Exodus, God gave the nation of Israel the law so that this corruption and oppression would not be repeated, at least with his people. In the law the LORD declares both, “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land;’” (Deuteronomy 15:11) **and** “But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess.” (Deuteronomy 15:4) These appear at first glance (perhaps, even on second glance) to be contradictory statements. But the LORD is saying because of the sin of the world there will always be those who are poor; however, if my people follow

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3:9.

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 26:1-10 is a great summary of the story of the Exodus especially surrounding the relationship between God and the nation of Israel.



the law that I give them there will be no one who is truly poor and all of my people will be blessed. That is, yes there will be some who are hungry and poor in our midst, but not if we use the blessings that God has given us. Through our sharing what God has generously provided us, those who would otherwise be poor will not be. The Law sets forth stipulations for allowing the poor to glean the fields,<sup>5</sup> to pick fruit from the trees,<sup>6</sup> and to be treated fairly.<sup>7</sup> The LORD has declared that every seven years there be a Sabbath year, the fields to remain unplowed so the poor can eat from them and debts that are owed will be cancelled.<sup>8</sup> In addition every fiftieth year is the year of Jubilee, where not only debts are cancelled, but land is restored and families are released from servitude.<sup>9</sup> Through these commands, God has established a system for the poor and needy to be cared for by the community.

Unfortunately, Israel abandons this aspect of community and institutes a monarchy, which creates a severe division between the poor and the wealthy.<sup>10</sup> Samuel warns the people of this when they cried out for a king saying,

these will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take

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<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 19:9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 23:24-25.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 15:7-11.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 23:11; Deuteronomy 15:2.

<sup>9</sup> Leviticus 25.

<sup>10</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "Poverty and the State in Biblical Thought," *Judaism* 25, no. 2 (1976): 234.

the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day (I Samuel 8:11-18).

In the centuries to follow we see how the words of Samuel hold true as the people suffer heavy taxation in order to support the various monarchies.<sup>11</sup> This leads to many corrupt kings, who were supposed to be the protectors of Israel. Instead they become greatest oppressors of those most in need, which demonstrates the incompatibility between human kingship and the divine kingship.<sup>12</sup> This leads to witnessing the LORD as the righteous defender of the poor, calling for the oppressors to repent and yield to the justice of the Law throughout the books of the prophets.

Because of some exciting battles like Elijah versus the Prophets of Baal,<sup>13</sup> it is often assumed that the main offense against Israel which led them into the exile was the worship of false gods. But throughout the prophets we see God again and again calling for justice and righteousness for the poor, widowed, orphaned and oppressed. This is especially true in the book of the prophet Amos. We see the LORD declaring he no longer cares about the sacrifices and offerings of the people. He will not respond to their worship and prayers; instead He calls upon them to deliver righteousness and justice.<sup>14</sup> Through their greed and unrighteousness, Israel has abandoned the LORD, especially in their abuse of the poor.<sup>15</sup> Amos declares the sins of Israel, which include selling the poor into slavery for failing to repay a paltry sum (like a pair of sandals) and denying justice to

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<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Oden "Taxation in Biblical Israel," *Journal Of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 2 (1984): 164.

<sup>12</sup> Levinson, "Poverty and the State," 234.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kings 18:16-46.

<sup>14</sup> Amos 5:18-24.

<sup>15</sup> Curtis Paul DeYoung, "Let Justice Roll like Waters," *Clergy Journal* 84, no. 6 (April 2008): 7.

the poor and oppressed.<sup>16</sup> As if they did not trample the poor enough, they use dishonest scales, boost the price, and sell every last bit of grain—down to the sweepings of dust on the floor.<sup>17</sup> In the book of Isaiah, we again hear of a God frustrated with empty worship, who promises to listen and respond to the cries of the people, but only after they first respond with the true worship of providing justice to the impoverished: food to the hungry, shelter to the wanderer, clothing to the naked, and not turning away from a brother in need.<sup>18</sup> Thus the LORD as defender of the poor, especially against the corrupt upper class and monarchy of Israel and Judah, led to the promise of a new hope: a king who would deliver the poor and needy from injustice.<sup>19</sup>

God delivers that promised king, indeed becomes that promised king in the person of Jesus. In so doing he declares in a loud voice how dearly the poor are loved and cared for as he himself, though rich, became poor to bring forth His kingdom into the world.<sup>20</sup> The message of the kingdom is also powerful. Jesus begins his ministry in Nazareth, declaring those words from Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>21</sup> Throughout his ministry, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God to virtually every type of person imaginable: children, the Samaritan woman, the lepers, the demon-possessed and tax collectors. It appears that the message of the kingdom of God is

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<sup>16</sup> Amos 2:6-9.

<sup>17</sup> Amos 8:5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 58:3-12.

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 11:1-5.

<sup>20</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9.

<sup>21</sup> Luke 4:18-19 from Isaiah 61:1-3.

for everyone. Virtually every sort of marginalized or outcast person is promised a place in the kingdom of God. Indeed in the New Testament the poor seem to replace Israel as the focus for the good news of God's love.<sup>22</sup> As the nations were supposed to experience the holiness of God through Israel, now the people are responding to Jesus through his ministry to the poor and outcast. The Samaritan woman declares to her village, "come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Christ?"<sup>23</sup> And through her witness, Jesus stays in that town for two days teaching the people, Samaritans at that, of God's kingdom. Jesus gives those who respond to his message, to his kingdom, a new identity: they have become children of God.<sup>24</sup> Those considered powerless, outcast and sinners are welcomed as God's children; they are not only welcomed by God, but identified with Him. Jesus states that those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give a drink to the thirsty, take in the stranger, and visit the prisoner are in fact doing those things for Him.<sup>25</sup> It seems in order to properly experience the power and glory of God's grace and his kingdom we must see it through his ministry to the poor and needy. Perhaps this is why Jesus told the "Rich Young Ruler" to sell all that he had and give it to the poor; and upon the dejected young man's departure Jesus comments of the challenge for those who are rich to enter the Kingdom of God.<sup>26</sup> Those who separate themselves from the poor separate themselves from God. However, those who long to be imitators of God, to have relationship with God, and to remember that as God's children they too

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, "Poverty and Wealth," in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 524.

<sup>23</sup> John 4:29.

<sup>24</sup> John 1:12.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 25:31-46.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 10:17-31.

were delivered from poverty, either as slaves in Egypt or slaves to sin, are urged to execute compassion<sup>27</sup> and righteousness to those impoverished in their midst.<sup>28</sup>

### **Our Response to Poverty**

It is clear from both the relationship that God has with the poor and his commands to His people that we are expected to care for the poor and needy. However, how we care for the poor might not be as simple. It is accurate to say that not all poverty is equal; therefore, our response to the poor cannot be pigeon-holed into one reaction. There are a variety of cases, situations, and symptoms of poverty that affect peoples' lives. Some of them are temporary emergencies, such as a sudden loss of employment; some are chronic and generational; some are dependent upon environment and culture. How one might respond to a housing crisis in urban America would be quite different than the response in Haiti before or after the devastating 2010 earthquake. Because of these differences, our response to poverty appears to fall into one of three categories: *relief*, *reform*, or *reorder*.<sup>29</sup> These are not exhaustive categories; nor do they operate completely independently from one another. They do, however, provide a good starting point in examining the ways that poverty might be addressed. The remainder of this chapter will

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<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity* (New York: Random House, 2011), 5. In this secular observation about rebuilding the United States economy, Sachs states that we must "remember that compassion is the glue that holds society together."

<sup>28</sup> David T. Gordon, "A Biblical Theology of Poverty and Almsgiving." Lecture, The Road from Poverty to Freedom, Grove City College, Grove City, PA, April 4 & 5, 2005, [www.gcc.savvior.com/docs/Gordon\\_Poverty%20and%20Almsgiving.pdf](http://www.gcc.savvior.com/docs/Gordon_Poverty%20and%20Almsgiving.pdf). (Accessed July 17, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> These categories are adopted from a combination of the categories listed in Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor-- and Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 104 cf. where the authors describe a trio of responses labeled "relief, rehabilitation, and development;" and from the article by Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, "Poverty Eradication: a Divine Mandate," *AFER* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 198-214. where he describes three methods of alleviation undertaken by society more specifically as "enabling the poor to stay alive...building up the poor [but stopping] short of liberating them completely from poverty conditions...[and by] dismantling the very conditions that perpetuate poverty."

focus on relief, while chapter three will address the idea of reform; and chapter four will concentrate on reorder.

## **Relief**

The first of the three responses to poverty alleviation is relief. Relief is the basic provision of those things which are necessary for life: water, food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. This describes much of the care for the poor in the Scriptures. The LORD commands Israel not to harvest right to the edge of the field or gather the gleanings, but to leave them for the poor and the sojourners.<sup>30</sup> This is exactly the situation in the book of Ruth. Boaz is gracious to allow Ruth to glean in his fields for herself and Naomi, even going so far as to instruct his workers to drop some of the wheat out of the bundles, in order for her to collect more.<sup>31</sup> Each Sabbath year the people are called to forgive the debts of their brothers;<sup>32</sup> the thought being that those who have the ability and wealth to lend money, also have the ability to forgive those debts and not be repaid.<sup>33</sup>

The call for relief continues in the New Testament. John the Baptist instructs the crowd: if you have two tunics, give one to someone who does not have one. If you have food, share with someone who does not have any.<sup>34</sup> James reinforces that the role of the Church is to provide relief via clothing and food to the poor.<sup>35</sup> Paul calls upon the Church

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<sup>30</sup> Leviticus 23:22.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth 2:15-16.

<sup>32</sup> Deuteronomy 15:2.

<sup>33</sup> David T. Gordon, "A Biblical Theology of Poverty and Almsgiving," Lecture, The Road from Poverty to Freedom, Grove City College, Grove City, PA, April 4 & 5, 2005, [www.gcc.savvior.com/docs/Gordon\\_Poverty%20and%20Almsgiving.pdf](http://www.gcc.savvior.com/docs/Gordon_Poverty%20and%20Almsgiving.pdf). (Accessed July 17, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Luke 3:12.

<sup>35</sup> James 2:14-15.

to be generous, especially in collecting for the famine that affected Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> The hope for relief even appears in the parables: the Prodigal Son, suffering from hunger and despair in the midst of famine, returns home, hopeful that his father will treat him as a hired worker and provide him with the relief of food and shelter.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps an even better example of relief in the parables is seen in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to provide assistance to the man who was beaten, robbed, and left half-dead. The Samaritan bandaged and cared for the beaten man, taking him to safety and providing financially for his care.<sup>38</sup> This parable is the perfect example of relief as described by the authors of *When Helping Hurts*, who suggest that “relief should be seldom, immediate, and temporary.”<sup>39</sup> They define relief as being those responses which “stop the bleeding” of a situation.<sup>40</sup> This would include giving assistance to the people in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, to those in Indonesia after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, or to the people of Haiti following the 2010 earthquake. There is an extreme and urgent need to respond to these people whose lives are devastated and much around them destroyed. After this initial and brief period of providing economic and material relief, comes the time for rehabilitation. In defining “relief” as something that is to be seldom, immediate, and temporary they provide a helpful guideline for effectively dealing with poverty alleviation, especially if the goal is to bring people to self-reliance.

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<sup>36</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

<sup>37</sup> Luke 15:17-21. It is important to note that the Prodigal Son did not repent until he saw the father running toward him, but had merely developed a plan of saving himself in hunger based upon Leviticus 25:39-40. It was only after experiencing the costly grace of the father that he repented and accepted the love the father offered. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1992), 152-155.

<sup>38</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>39</sup> Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 110.

<sup>40</sup> Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 104.



As an inner-city church, people routinely drop in looking for “emergency assistance.”<sup>41</sup> People are in need of quite a variety of things: rent money, utility bill assistance, gasoline, food, clothing, transportation, the list goes on. Generally, I put those relief guidelines into place. The assistance I give when someone comes into my office is seldom, immediate, and temporary. It depends on several factors: whether I have given that person assistance previously, what are the current needs, the urgency of those needs, the corroboration of those needs, and if there is another resource which already provides a solution to this need<sup>42</sup> —all of these elements go into my relief decision making. Generally speaking, I am happy to walk down to the gas station and put a few gallons of gasoline in someone’s car if they are passing through town and in need. I am also willing to help out with a bus ticket for someone trying to get home, find work, or check themselves into drug/alcohol rehabilitation. I am also quite willing to give relief for emergency life needs such as rent or certain utilities provided they have been referred to me by Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army, who have the resources to do the background checking to ensure that they are legitimate cases.<sup>43</sup> In each of these cases, people receive immediate, one-time relief gifts.<sup>44</sup> It is not possible, or even helpful, to continuously provide relief upon every request.

The one request I get most often that I never assist with financially is that of emergency housing. My church is right near the bus station, so we are often one of the

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<sup>41</sup> I do not mean to imply that people do not drop in for assistance at suburban or rural churches, but having served in all three types, there are far more drop-ins in this urban church than the others.

<sup>42</sup> A good example of this is help for heating bills, of which there is a government program to address this need.

<sup>43</sup> There are scammers out there, believe it or not.

<sup>44</sup> I do tell people that I will only help them once a year, without a meeting with their social services case worker. That is, I am fine to help more often, but I need to be more involved (this is discussed more in the next chapter).



first stops they will make when looking for a hotel or a place to stay. Thankfully, I have a social services worker in my congregation who gave me guidance that the county provides emergency shelter for those in need. All one has to do is go to the police station about two blocks from the church, and as long as there are no outstanding warrants for their arrest, social services will be called and they will be taken care of. If there are outstanding warrants, well then, they still will have a place to stay! This is what I tell each person who comes to me. Generally, those with no warrants thank me and head straight for the police station.<sup>45</sup>

This is another helpful guideline in relief—if there are organizations already providing this specific relief, exhaust those resources first. This is especially true, considering every organization has limited funds.<sup>46</sup> This means that every church, every pastor, every organization must devise their own “relief” guidelines in order to help as many of those in true need as possible, while not allowing an individual to become too reliant on that relief, as the ultimate goal is to help people not just be relieved from poverty, but lifted up from it.

In seeking to achieve this goal, the desire of making a better decision should not keep us from doing something good and maybe even right. For instance, Steve Corbett writes about two situations where he could have improved his response to the

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<sup>45</sup> Others, of course, do not thank me nor head for the station, but they understand and I have never had a single altercation with anyone since gaining this advice from my parishioner.

<sup>46</sup> One of the greatest disappointments of the current economic crisis is that the FEMA funding to local charitable organizations in our community such as Catholic Charities has been gouged. Only two years ago we could partner effectively with them for help and assistance, especially in regard to obtaining funds for security deposits in order to begin renting apartments. Currently they only have the funds to help individuals with \$100. Needless to say, this makes partnering much more challenging, as Catholic Charities has to turn away people that we are referring to them.

circumstances at hand. The first involved a young mother who came to his door in search of food. He later found out that this young woman had gotten food from other neighbors, and although he had given her food, suggested the better alternative would have been for the community to cut her off and help her find other alternatives.<sup>47</sup> The second situation involved his serving dinner in a homeless shelter and his regret that the shelter did not involve the men in helping plan, organize, shop for and prepare the meal, but instead did everything short of “spoon-feeding” them.<sup>48</sup> I understand the sentiment in both of these examples, but I think he is being a little hard on himself and confusing a stronger solution for one that was good, and frankly, biblical. Is not the woman going from door to door a cultural equivalent to gleaning the fields? This may not be the best way for her to escape the clutches of poverty, but it is a way for her to receive food. This is also true for those who are staying at the homeless shelter. They are gleaning what others have prepared for them. Moreover, for us this is answering the call that Jesus gave, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

I am reminded of the saying, “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for his life.” The point of this saying is that it is better to teach a man to fish than to just give him a fish. But, by giving him a fish, you are in fact feeding him, if only for that day—which is a good thing. Teaching a man to fish might be better, but it is also a much greater investment. The reality is that poverty alleviation is a process. It is a process in us, and a process in the culture. And like in many instances, there is not a clear, defined point where we pass from point A to point B.

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<sup>47</sup> Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 106-107.

<sup>48</sup> Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 110-111.

Or in this case, from relief to reform. The process first begins in us, which is the point the authors of *When Helping Hurts* are making. They are looking at past instances and seeing how they could have responded differently, if they knew then what they know now. We all do this. Truly, this is the glory of Christ working in us and through us. They have a heart for the poor, the lost, the broken; they have a desire to see those people built up into God's children. They know that Jesus came to save the poor and downtrodden, that they have value, that they are His. And this has transformed who they are. Praise God!!! But it did not start there. It started the day they put food into that young mother's bag. It continued time after time when they gave of themselves to prepare and serve food to people who were broken and devastated by life. It continued as they traveled around the world and saw the effect that poverty had on people's lives. And they realized---"we must do more." For most of the people in my congregation they need that starting point, that place where they can begin that internal and spiritual process. It begins by creating situations where they can provide relief to those who are poor and in need, like helping to serve the poor at the Community Meal. It begins by giving away some of their wealth to those who need it. It begins with embracing the commands of Scripture and living into that proverb which calls us to abandon chasing after wealth and being stingy with those around us, for the greedy pursuit of riches leads to true poverty in ourselves.<sup>49</sup> For most of us, it takes giving away many fish before we invest ourselves to come alongside them and teach them.

The responses of poverty alleviation are part of a process, and as such these categories are not completely rigid. That is, there may be spill-over from one to the other,

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<sup>49</sup> Proverbs 28:22.

especially as it relates to our personal responses. For instance, it is difficult to classify the support I send to Compassion International for my sponsor-child, Solomon, in Ethiopia. Is it relief? I do little more personally than send money. Although I pray for him,<sup>50</sup> write emails, and send pictures, I am not actively involved in enhancing his situation outside of sending the support that will keep him nourished and healthy. Thus, while I am hoping that Compassion International is working to help reform his situation, my part is limited. Moreover, with nearly every aspect of poverty alleviation, simultaneous aspects are being addressed. This is true from enabling people to grow through education opportunities in North America to crop enhancement in Africa. One does not just abandon relief when they begin to seek reform. Indeed, reform is the natural outflow from relief, the next step in the poverty alleviation process.

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<sup>50</sup> This is certainly not to minimize the effects and power of prayer, of which this entire case study is a direct result.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE

#### **Reform**

In this chapter we will examine the second category of responding through poverty alleviation, that of reform. The response of reform is the broadest of the three. Reform involves working to alleviate poverty through efforts that build up and enhance people to become more self-reliant within the current existing systems.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous ways in which this is accomplished, especially considering that we are obliged to help those in need based on the opportunities that present themselves, the abilities that we hold, and the influence that we possess.<sup>2</sup> Those who work for reform obviously do not ignore relief. However, what differentiates reform from relief is investment and advocacy. The investment of time, investment of relationship, and investment of resources are all vital components that go into reform efforts.

Without undervaluing the importance of relief, it takes a smaller amount of investment. (Note that I did not say a small or insignificant amount of investment, just a lesser amount than reform.) For instance many relief efforts in which we involve ourselves take a little more effort than writing a check or donating some food or clothing to a local charitable organization. While these are important acts, they obviously do not take a great deal of investment; the involvement is completed after that limited action.

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, "Poverty Eradication: a Divine Mandate," *AFER* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 202.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 77.

Even in the aforementioned parable of the Good Samaritan his relief efforts were completed when he left the inn. There was little more that he was going to be able to do for the injured man without making more of an investment in his life. Was the man beaten to the point where he could no longer work? Were his injuries so severe that he would be dependent on others for his care for the rest of his life? If either of these occurred, then in order for the Samaritan to remain involved in his care, it would be as an advocate for justice. We who are strong have an obligation to care for those who are weak, to do good for them and empower them.<sup>3</sup> And this is the heart of reform as we analyze it from a biblical and theological foundation. Making an investment of ourselves and becoming an advocate for the poor and powerless is generally referred to as seeking justice and/or righteousness throughout the scriptures. Much of what might be classified as reform today would be synonymous with the biblical command of seeking justice for the poor and oppressed.

In seeking justice we are actively involved in correcting the oppression of those around us. This is the first principle of taking the next steps of poverty alleviation.<sup>4</sup> Many of the instances that churches, pastors, and people find themselves involved in offering assistance to the poor or oppressed are determined by the initiative of the poor themselves. Go back to the young mother going door-to-door for food. She was doing this of her own volition. This is normally the case. A poor person comes to your door looking for a handout. A person shows up to eat dinner at the local soup kitchen. A person whose heat is about to be turned off seeks out assistance at Social Services. This

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 15:1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 71.

is the cultural norm for much of the way we handle those impoverished around us. This is due in part, to the slew of government programs where it is assumed people with needs are being cared for. But what was true in the time of the prophet Jeremiah still holds true today. The government, who is supposed to be champion of justice, can just as often become the agent by which injustice occurs.<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah addresses each of these realities as he calls for the king and people to execute justice on behalf of the poor and the oppressed and to take action when they have been robbed or mistreated.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, only a few verses later he gives a scathing denunciation of King Jehoiakim, who has oppressed the poor, actually enslaving his own people in order for his luxurious cedar palace to be built.<sup>7</sup> He is actually referred to as one, who unlike his father, Josiah, and the righteous kings before him, has “eyes and heart only for [his] dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence ”<sup>8</sup> among his people. Therefore, it would be unwise to presume that the government will be the sole champion of seeking justice for those who are in need. Thus, we must come to the recognition and realization that the responsibility for acting on behalf of the poor should come from the advantaged and not from the poor themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, much of what the LORD commands in relation to the poor is, in fact, advocating on their behalf, seeking justice and righteousness in order for their needs to be met. Because God has identified himself and his love for the poor and needy, many of

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<sup>5</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 21:12; 22:2-4.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 22:11-17.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 22:17.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce C. Birch, "Hunger, Poverty, and Biblical Religion," *The Christian Century* (June 11, 1975): 593.

these commands are found in relation to worship and sacrifice. This is especially true in the prophetic books of the Bible where, over and over, God declares that he despises the offerings and sacrifices made by the people and instead desires justice and righteousness in the land.<sup>10</sup> This is perhaps clearest in the first chapter of the prophet Isaiah, which sets the tone for God's promises of both judgment and salvation:

'What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?' says the LORD; 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.' 'Come now, let us reason together,' says the LORD: 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.' (Isaiah 1:11-20).

This connection can also be found in the positive in the New Testament, where Paul declares that offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is our true act of worship.<sup>11</sup> In doing so we are led to fulfill the call of being a part of the Church, to put the needs of others above our own,<sup>12</sup> to practice hospitality, and to share with those who are in need.<sup>13</sup> Thus we see a strong connection between our worship of the living God and advocating for justice in the lives of his people.

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<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 6:10; 7:21; 22:3; Hosea 2:11; Amos 5:18-24; Micah 6:6-8.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 12:1.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 12:10; also Philippians 2:4.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 12:13.



God's command for seeking justice is found elsewhere throughout the Scriptures. In fact, unlike our system of democratic equal rights, there seems to be a biased system of justice toward the poor.<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that they were to be treated differently under the Law or given special dispensation if they violated the covenant regulations.<sup>15</sup> But much of the Law prescribed not taking advantage of the poor, of judges not taking bribes,<sup>16</sup> of making sure that basic needs were provided for all.<sup>17</sup> Thus, unlike today's system where judges are meant to be neutral in their decision-making with only the impartiality of the law to be their guide, God does not wish for the judges to be separated from the issues presented. They are meant to be operating agents to make sure that the basic needs of the people are carried out.<sup>18</sup> This call goes beyond just those rendering judgment, however; it is meant to be a regulation embraced by the entire covenant community.

This is challenging, because with wealth comes comfort, detachment, and even isolation. Proverbs 10:15 reads, "a rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin." This passage demonstrates the fortress that wealth can provide for us. The wealthy are protected from much of the horrors of the world. They have plenty to eat and are not hungry; they have safe drinking water; they have doctors to provide them with the best medical care; they have houses that protect them from the elements; they have police that protect them from crime; they have educational and employment

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<sup>14</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Leviticus 19:15.

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 18:21; 23:8; Deuteronomy 10:17; 16:19; 27:25.

<sup>17</sup> Leviticus 25:35.

<sup>18</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 72.

opportunities; they have the ability to never venture outside of the fortress or stronghold that wealth has given to them.

But, the poverty of the poor is their ruin. They are hungry, thirsty, uneducated, unemployed, sick, needy, homeless, deprived, and unprotected. Ultimately their true ruin is that they are powerless in their poverty. This is why the LORD does not call for the poor to lift themselves from poverty, but for the rich to build them up. We, who have the ability, influence, and resources are to advocate and seek justice for those unable to do so for themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The real dilemma we face when we decide that we must advocate for the poor and seek justice is where to begin. There are certain cultural and socio-economic realities that must be taken into consideration. For instance, it is impossible to merely look at an average annual salary or daily living wage on a global scale. Our church sponsors children through Compassion International. We send the families of those children gifts of several hundred dollars each year. With \$200 Kevin's family, who live in Kenya, was able to get a pair of bulls, a plow, and seeds to help cultivate their land. Flore's family, who live in Burkina Faso, purchased several household items, such as oil, rice, clothing, and blankets, and also purchased enough fabric that the family was going to begin a sewing business selling clothing in the marketplace. So \$200 was not only plenty to stock up on groceries and clothing, but was used as venture capital for a new business. When I see the pictures of all that was purchased with such a small amount of money I am blown

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<sup>19</sup> This is a constant theme throughout both James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: the Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Jeffrey Sachs, *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity* (New York: Random House, 2011).

away. Contrast this with how little \$200 buys in our country. One block from my church is a hotel that offers weekly room rates. There are no kitchens in these rooms, no private bathrooms—just a very small room in a hotel that has received numerous nuisance complaints and health code violations. Two hundred dollars will enable you to stay in one of these rooms for only two weeks!!! Therefore, when we begin to address areas of reform we must do so by taking into account a broad range of factors.

Taking into account these factors is especially true if we are looking to be involved in reform on both a local and a global level. As we saw in the above examples there can be a great deal of difference in the buying power within the global economy. But there are also broad differences in other aspects. The ways in which we relate to poverty, indeed relate to most things that affect our way of life, is done through “anchoring.”<sup>20</sup> In anchoring we measure our circumstances against some benchmark, such as I am doing better than my parents. Or, I used to have to walk five miles to fetch water from the river, but now there is a well in my village. So while there are many, especially in the United States, who look across the world and see horrible conditions in the garment factories in China or Bangladesh, and cry out in horror, they must take into consideration these anchor points. For many of those workers, most of them women, this is their first step out of deep rural poverty. They have left behind a life of hard, taxing labor, where they would be grinding out a difficult existence, spending much of their life bearing children, and facing extreme health risks. Now, they have an opportunity to be more self-reliant, and while these garment factory conditions are not optimal, indeed

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<sup>20</sup> Adam Davidson, “Pietra Rivoli’s T-shirt Travels,” *Planet Money* (audio blog), November 19, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/11/19/131450313/the-friday-podcast-pietra-rivoli-s-t-shirt-travels>. (Accessed November 24, 2010).

unacceptable in this country, for them it is a huge step up. In a recent Planet Money podcast, one Chinese worker in a T-shirt factory told of how she discovered make-up for the first time, and repeatedly told how much she despised the ducks on her family's duck farm. That, though she was not crazy about this job, she saw it as a much greater step up the ladder of success in comparison to her parent's duck farm existence.<sup>21</sup>

This is also the point of Jeffery Sachs in his book *The End of Poverty*.<sup>22</sup> He compares the conditions of many of these factories today to the factories in England and the United States of 100 years ago, and how female factory workers in Bangladesh see this as the greatest opportunity they have ever had.<sup>23</sup> In this country, most of us have a different benchmark, so we need to be open in our perspectives as we seek to invest in the global reform efforts of poverty alleviation. To this end, Sachs is working hard to champion the cause to aid people living in extreme poverty, those who live on less than one dollar per day, and who fight daily just to survive; and also for those who live in moderate poverty, those who live on one to two dollars each day and are striving to climb the "ladder of development."<sup>24</sup> Through both relief and reform efforts, Sachs articulates an excellent strategy for the strong of the world to seek justice for the poor and weak,

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<sup>21</sup> Adam Davidson "Pietra Rivoli's T-shirt Travels," *Planet Money* (audio blog), November 19, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/11/19/131450313/the-friday-podcast-pietra-rivoli-s-t-shirt-travels>. (Accessed November 24, 2010) Pietra Rivoli also commented how the girl wore sparkled spiked heeled shoes, which have must been incredibly uncomfortable, but certainly were nowhere to be found on a duck farm.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffery Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 24.

providing for the most basic of needs, such as water, food, anti-malarial bed-nets, immunizations, and primary education.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, even in the best-case scenarios of poverty alleviation in the poorest regions of the world, there is absolutely no margin for error; or in the case of Yvrose Jean Baptiste, no room for the violent acts of nature.<sup>26</sup> Yvrose was fortunate enough to receive microfinance loans from a bank in Haiti. Every two weeks she would take a bus trip to the border of the Dominican Republic, where she would purchase goods and produce to take back to Port-au-Prince. In Port-au-Prince she worked with a few shops who would sell her goods on a consignment basis. She would come back at the end of two weeks, collect her money, pay off the loan at the bank, garner a new loan, and repeat the whole process. This was all working fine, until only a couple of days after her last trip to the Dominican Republic, Haiti experienced a devastating and destructive earthquake. The stores where Yvrose sold her goods were destroyed and her inventory was gone. She had no money but possessed an outstanding bank loan, now with very little hope of repaying it. In the aftermath of the earthquake she was selling chicken-necks to the people in the relief camps. If she was able to sell all her chicken necks each day, she would have enough money to repay the loan sharks who lent her the money, purchase another batch of chicken necks for the next day and have the equivalent of one dime profit. This case demonstrates how tenuous poverty alleviation reform efforts can be.

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<sup>25</sup> These are actually the Millennium Development Goals signed by all 191 nations that are part of the United Nations. Sachs plan is to alleviate extreme poverty by 2025. This book has had a dramatic impact upon my own thought and passion dealing with the reality of poverty.

<sup>26</sup> The story of Yvrose Jean Baptiste was reported on Planet Money in the days following the 2010 earthquake in Caitlin Kenney, "Small Business, Bid Debts in Haiti," *Planet Money*, February 16, 2010, [http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/02/podcast\\_entrepreneurship\\_in\\_ha.html](http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/02/podcast_entrepreneurship_in_ha.html), (Accessed February 24, 2010).

These efforts are equally tenuous in this country, especially when dealing with the variety of financial, emotional, and psychological issues that exist. As I stated, “anchoring” occurs within each of us. This means that while most of those in our communities are rich in the eyes of the world (after all even many of the poor have access to safe drinking water, education, housing, and basic food and healthcare) they are still oppressed and impoverished by the standards of our society. There are those who find themselves trapped in an endless cycle of generational poverty, never being able to navigate and climb the ladders of economic development in this country. Katherine Newman tracks a myriad of low-wage workers at a fast food restaurant over a period of several years to see how they progress. In her book *Chutes and Ladders*,<sup>27</sup> she tracks the progress of forty people over a ten year period to see how they have improved. After a decade she found that while twenty percent had improved dramatically, entering the job market in growth positions and making at least \$30,000 per year, a majority were still trapped in those same low-wage jobs. These were people weighed down by family obligations, had little education, faced racial prejudice, who circulated in and out of the labor market, and cycled on and off public assistance. They were dependent upon the kindness of their family when they could not get benefits and upon the welfare system when they could.<sup>28</sup>

Many of the people who attend our Community Meal fall into this category. One woman I will call G. recounted the problems of living in this cycle. G. is a thirty-something woman living at the poverty line. She is occasionally employed in a low-

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<sup>27</sup> Katherine S. Newman, *Chutes and Ladders: Navigating the Low-wage Labor Market*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Newman, *Chutes and Ladders*, 108-109.

paying hourly waged job, most recently at a local grocery store. By holding this position she faces several difficulties. First, she is part of the social services system where she receives benefits for being impoverished. This breeds a certain amount of fear and dependency: fear of losing benefits for making too much money; fear of losing benefits for not looking for employment; fear of losing benefits for all sorts of reasons, both realistic and unrealistic.

Just because something is unlikely, does not mean that the fear is any less real. This is the dependency aspect that those who receive benefits find themselves. They rely on the government to help provide them an income in order for them to live in our society. Presently, G. lives with her boyfriend, who is unemployed, and with one child (although she has another child currently living with her sister in another town, as well as another child who is imprisoned.) She is renting out another room to a "friend" in order to make ends meet. One problem is weighing on G.'s mind right now. During one of the times where she and her boyfriend were both employed she furnished her apartment with some items from Rent-A-Center, a local business where furniture is rented weekly at exorbitant prices, compared to buying retail, even with a high interest credit card. Now that her boyfriend is unemployed and someone else is living in her apartment she is fearful to go to work, not knowing when she comes home if the furniture will be gone, either stolen by her tenant, sold by her boyfriend, or repossessed by the company. The flip side is there is no way she cannot go to work. She needs this job. From an outside vantage point, it seems there should be an easy solution to alleviate G.'s fear and distrust. But when one starts peeling back the layers of this situation, it becomes blurrier and



blurrier, and quickly apparent that there is no quick fix, either financially or in the alleviation of G.'s fears.

This is part of the cycle in which many people find themselves. They are uneducated and trapped in low-wage jobs. Meanwhile housing prices and rents are climbing at rates much higher than inflation. They do not have enough credit to buy furnishings in a normal store, but there are places like Rent-A-Center which will gladly rent to you. While this is not economically a wise option, we all need affirmation. Businesses, like this, exploit the poor by using affirmation and the pursuit of “the American dream” as tools. They say, “well done, you have earned the right to have new furniture.” Here is a corporation temporarily building up and empowering the poor psychologically to maximize that corporation’s profits, while keeping their customers entrenched in fiscal poverty and dependent. This is not an unusual case.

The following case comes from Larry Rivlin’s book *Broke USA*.<sup>29</sup> Larry and Martha Clay lived in a working-class neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio. They were both blind and in their early seventies. They had purchased their home in the mid-1980s for \$15,000. Larry had worked as an X-ray technician at the hospital for 39 years before the hospital closed. Martha had undergone treatments for ovarian cancer. In order to “help” them with their finances they were approached by mortgage companies to refinance their loan at a better rate. Over a period of a few years this predatory lending company had re-mortgaged them six times, and they now owed upwards of \$80,000 on a house with an

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<sup>29</sup> Gary Rivlin, *Broke, USA: from Pawnshops to Poverty, Inc. : How the Working Poor Became Big Business*, (New York: Harper, 2010): 248-249.



assessed value of \$37,000. They paid \$20,000 in closing costs alone. They were facing a \$702/ month mortgage payment compared to one that had originally been a small fraction of that and were facing eviction until the Equal Justice Foundation came to their defense. Many of those who are poor and oppressed in our country are facing what sounds strikingly familiar to what the prophet Amos railed against. We are continually oppressing the downtrodden, bringing them into debt so deep that they cannot repay and must sell themselves to make good. While not forced into slavery per se, many people are being evicted, forced into bankruptcy, or forced to incur debt that is astronomical and so overpowering that they will never escape.

This is why poverty reform must be so broad. There are such wide varieties of injustice and oppression occurring in the world, in our nation, even in our own back-yard. One more illustration addresses perhaps the barest sort of poverty alleviation reform that I have encountered. M. was a regular attendee of our Community Meal and came to me looking for money to take a taxi to Albany in order to move in with her daughter. This was about a seventy-five dollar fare. In the course of my conversation with her I discovered that she was a victim of domestic violence and was currently residing in the hotel that rents out rooms by the week. I went with her to visit her case worker through the Center for Domestic Violence to make sure that this was an acceptable alternative, figuring they would be far more aware of this situation than I was. Upon learning that this was likely the best alternative for her, and that frankly she was lucky to be alive, I set up funding for her to receive a taxi ride.

If the encounter had ended there it would have been a nice, although, not a very memorable example of relief. However, she was distraught because she had no way to cash her Social Security check. I was perplexed about this and asked why this was so. She said that she had been giving her landlord the check to pay for her rent. He would cash it, take the rent (along with a fee) and give her the remainder. Since she was moving he was unwilling to continue this check cashing arrangement, even for the fee. When I told her she could go into any bank and cash her check, she protested saying that she did not have an account in any bank. I assured her that this was not a problem. All banks will cash her Social Security check for no fee. I walked with her to the bank, and together the teller and I convinced her that she could in fact cash this check. The teller even informed her that she was eligible for a free checking account if she directly deposited her Social Security check, and gave her the form to accomplish this. While the prospect of a bank account was way too overwhelming to consider right then, let alone the concept of direct deposit, she was completely stunned that she was allowed to cash this check all by herself. Here was a woman in her fifties, who had no idea what her rights and abilities were. And while she was not suddenly transplanted out of poverty, she was empowered with a small bit of self-reliance. It is perhaps hard to envision this as reform, or seeking justice upon her behalf, but she will never again pay a fee for cashing that check. But, it took someone advocating for her, investing himself in her, educating her, and taking a couple of hours out of his life to open up this opportunity for her.

Seeking justice for the poor and oppressed is so broad because the need is so great and because it is dependent upon the abilities we possess, the opportunities that present

themselves, and the influence that we hold. William Wilberforce used his political influence to end the slave trade in England. The civil rights workers of the 1960s helped bring about voter-rights for African Americans and school integration. Jeffrey Sachs uses his influence as a high profile economist to help reform hyperinflation in Bolivia<sup>30</sup> and increase crop production in Malawi.<sup>31</sup> There are hundreds of instances and opportunities for us to use the influence and abilities that God has given us to seek justice for the poor and oppressed. Whether it is fighting for education or housing reform, teaching literacy, funding poverty alleviation efforts worldwide, or walking someone into the bank—we who are strong must not be content to stay behind the walls of our fortified cities, but must advocate for the poor trapped in their poverty. This is not only our obligation as children of God, but our act of worship of the living God, who has identified himself with the poor and oppressed.

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<sup>30</sup> Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 90-108.

<sup>31</sup> Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 5-10.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HURRY AND COME DOWN

#### **Reorder**

In the internet video sensation, *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, the title character describes to his web-audience his plan for world domination, which is "about destroying the status quo. Because the status is not quo."<sup>1</sup> The "status is not quo" is an appropriate line as we delve into the third response to poverty alleviation, which is reorder. Reorder can best be described as the action of dismantling the present systems and conditions that perpetuate poverty in society today.<sup>2</sup> Reorder is the response when relief and reform efforts are not sufficient answers to bring people out of the ruin of poverty.

This is seen in its clearest and most dramatic form in the Exodus.<sup>3</sup> The LORD heard the cries of the people of Israel enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt. He performed signs and wonders. He sent plagues and devastation. And finally, He sent the plague of the death of the firstborn, and upon losing the heir to his throne, Pharaoh finally allowed Israel to go free. Although even this was short-lived as Pharaoh almost immediately commanded his army to recapture and bring back the Israelites. The LORD, however, rescued Israel in the parting of the sea, and the Egyptian army was destroyed. The LORD was to lead Israel into the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. And although there was a forty year wait for this promise because of their disobedience and

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog, "Act 1", June 13, 2009 (originally aired July 15, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, "Poverty Eradication: a Divine Mandate," *AFER* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 202.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3-16.

unfaithfulness, the LORD still provided water to drink and bread to eat in the form of manna from heaven while they were in the wilderness.

The Exodus was not a process. It was not a series of programs and education. It did not bring relief efforts while they were enslaved. It was a miracle.<sup>4</sup> They went from being the poor and the oppressed slaves for the Pharaoh of Egypt to being free, the chosen people of God. They were fed and nourished and cared for by the LORD. They also would have been rich almost immediately and living in the Promised Land had they continued to follow the LORD's plan.<sup>5</sup> This was a reordering. God took those who were the weakest and raised them up, freeing them, empowering them, and made them the strongest in the land. This is the message that is central in liberation theology, which thrives in the poor nations of the world, especially in Latin America. While there is much in this theology to remind us of Christ's identity and love for the poor and the Church's responsibility to the poor, there is often an undercurrent that sparks, and sometimes even encourages, revolution and taking up arms in order to bring about justice.<sup>6</sup> This would be reorder at its most extreme. And as we saw within the Exodus, the revolution was short-lived, with God immediately delivering His people and then establishing the covenant of the Law with the people of Israel.<sup>7</sup> But even at a non-revolutionary level, some liberation theologians insist that a key to liberation is undergoing a fundamental economic shift of

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<sup>4</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Exodus and Exile: the Two Faces of Liberation," *Cross Currents* 23, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 299.

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Dana Sawchuk, "The Catholic Church in the Nicaraguan Revolution : A Gramscian Analysis," *Sociology of Religion* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 39-51.

<sup>7</sup> Yoder puts forth that the Exodus was the opposite of a takeover through seizure, but rather a withdrawing from Egypt through obedience to the Lord in the establishment of a new counter-community. Yoder, 300.

breaking away from the “structures of dependent capitalism.”<sup>8</sup> Thus we see that reorder seeks a dynamic shift and change occurring within the system or culture to bring about poverty alleviation.

Outside of the Exodus and armed-revolution, the response of reorder in poverty alleviation efforts can still be found, generally falling into one of four categories: the leader, the government, the community, or the individual.

### *The Leader*

In the books of Kings and Chronicles, the kings were labeled as those who did what was good or evil in the sight of the LORD. Many of these labels were in direct reference to how justice was being carried out. The king was supposed to be the agent who brought about justice and righteousness when there was oppression in the land.<sup>9</sup> In a Psalm attributed to Solomon, he prays,

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor! For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight (Psalm 72:1-2, 4, 12-14).

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<sup>8</sup> Hugh Lacey, "Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?" Review. *Cross Currents* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 254. I am not in agreement with this statement; and it could certainly be argued that the micro-credit lending led by the example of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has done far more for the poor through pseudo-capitalistic means than any sort of liberation movements. Muhammad Yunus and Alan Jolis, *Banker to the Poor: Micro-lending and the Battle against World Poverty* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> In his chapter on culture change, Hunter proposes that cultures rarely if ever change from the bottom-up, but almost always from the top-down, which emphasizes the importance of the leader (in this case the king) as the agent for change and reorder to occur in society. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: the Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41.

This is the role of the king. He is the one who is to conform to the will of God and defend the poor from the oppression that will likely occur. This is emphasized by the words of the prophet Isaiah, as he describes the messianic king, who is to shoot forth from the stump of Jesse. "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11:3b-4a).

Biblically, this model might be best emphasized not by a king, but by the governor, Nehemiah, shortly after the return of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity.<sup>10</sup> The scene emerges in the fifth chapter of Nehemiah, as the men are in the midst of building a wall around the city of Jerusalem; there is also a famine or at least a poor harvest in the land. This is leading to people mortgaging their fields and vineyards or selling themselves into indentured slavery in order to provide food for their families. Most of the Jews who have returned from the exile have had to pay a heavy tax to the Persians for the right to come home and be returned to their land, and now they are confronted with a situation which may leave them impoverished permanently.

But Nehemiah acts quickly and swiftly to reorder this situation.<sup>11</sup> Nehemiah hears the cries of the people and listens to the charges that are brought. He understands the issues that are at hand: the taxes, the food shortage, the work of building the wall, and sees the injustice that is taking place among his own people. This is probably the key

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<sup>10</sup> Nwaoru, "Poverty Eradication," 210.

<sup>11</sup> Nwaoru, "Poverty Eradication," 210. Nwaoru lays this out in five stages, but he omits a sixth which was perhaps the most important for the long-term success of this reorder, which was Nehemiah refusing the food allowance he was permitted to accept as the governor.

component, as Nehemiah quickly discovers that the main cause of the oppression causing poverty in their midst, both materially and spiritually, is the interest that is being exacted upon them from the nobles and officials.<sup>12</sup> So he gathered the nobles and officials together and brought this injustice to light, declaring that they have just been delivered from slavery to the nations, and now they were enslaving their own kindred again.<sup>13</sup> He called for a complete cancellation of debts, to stop lending money with interest to their countryman, and to return all of the land and vineyards that had been taken, as well as all of the interest that had been exacted.<sup>14</sup>

This seems incredible on so many levels. Could one imagine Bank of America not only cancelling the foreclosure of someone who cannot repay their mortgage, but returning all of the interest payments that they had made to date? But what makes this most impressive is that Nehemiah was also at fault, and had to repent of his own actions in order to bring about this change. It is one thing for rulers to call all of their officials and nobles to task, while they themselves refrain from applying the rule to themselves, but Nehemiah not only embraced the new order that he had enacted, he went a step further by not accepting the food allowance that he was entitled to receive. This demonstrated his commitment to serving the people and set an example that those who were strong were not to live lives of luxury at the expense of the weak. Rather, the strong were to be advocates for the weak, taking swift action to reorder acts of injustice. We see then, in Nehemiah, a leader, who lived into the Psalmist's call to defend the cause of the

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<sup>12</sup> Nehemiah 5:7.

<sup>13</sup> Nehemiah 5:8.

<sup>14</sup> Nehemiah 5:11.



poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor,<sup>15</sup> even if he was initially included among those oppressors.

### *The Government*

Governments, and rather than limit it to a single national entity I would also include multi-national organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank, are another mode by which reorder occurs. Governments exist to enhance the lives of their citizens and to protect the people. They give us things that we could not gain ourselves, like a military, public roads, and a legal/judicial infrastructure whereby the rights of the citizens are protected through laws and courts. Governments also have the ability to pass laws and make radical changes in the course of daily life. The abolition of slavery was a reordering of society, especially if you were the one who was enslaved or in possession of slaves. The integration of schools reordered the educational opportunities for all races. The separation of Church and State is a reordering that many nations could not fathom, as government and religion are intricately tied together in many countries, as they were for centuries in Europe and even now in the Middle East. Governments are probably the best mode to enact high-scale reordering, but they are also the least likely to do so, especially in a timely manner. This is especially true in a democratic society such as the United States, where our leaders are scrutinized and face being voted out of office if they are unpopular in the eyes of the people.<sup>16</sup> This leads to slow, cautious thought and action. So

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<sup>15</sup> Psalm 72:4.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffery Sachs writes that the two-year term in the House of Representatives is one of the biggest hurdles in bringing about true government change. For one their interests are generally focused on pleasing their local interests, rather than national ones. And two, they are always in campaign- mode, which means they are rarely, if ever, able to focus on, or risk looking at long-term solutions. Jeffrey Sachs, *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity* (New York: Random House, 2011), 108-9.

while much relief and reform gets undertaken in everything, not just poverty alleviation, there is very little reordering that occurs due to fear of backlash.

There are a myriad of ways that world governments could help alleviate poverty through a reordering, and one of the largest is through debt forgiveness and cancellation. As we saw in the example of those returning from the Babylonian exile, debt is an oppressive and crushing force. It has been likened to slavery, and in actuality, that is not far from the truth. The government could do much more to relieve the burden of debt in this country, and more importantly in the Third World nations. In the United States we have millions of people in debt. Granted that many of these people fall either into A) people who are in debt due to making home mortgages and car payments for relatively low interest rates that fall well into their income structure; or B) people who have taken on mortgages well out of their income range or those who have abused credit cards through overspending. We will put those people aside, and focus on those who have little-to-no credit; those who cannot qualify for a home even if the mortgage payment would be smaller than the rent they currently are paying now; those who are at risk for the abundance of predatory lenders that legally operate throughout the nation.

Many are in debt because of extremely high interest loans and mortgages, filled with numerous fees from one of these lenders. But there are still others, those who would never be considered “in debt” because they have no mortgage, no loan, or no credit card. Yet, week after week they are forced to hand over a portion of their paycheck in order to pay back one of the “payday” loans they must take out at their local check cashing

establishment. These loans are generally small, almost like microfinance loans, but pack a hefty interest charge of one and a half percent daily! If you borrow \$100 on Monday, you pay back \$107.50 five days later on Friday.<sup>17</sup> It doesn't seem like much, but this is the equivalent of almost 550 percent annually!!! The flipside is if they had a \$100 emergency and wrote a check from their bank account, when that account held less than \$100, they would bounce checks at thirty-two dollars per check.<sup>18</sup> This is considered a "fee," but considering the amount of money most people in the lower class would ever have in their accounts, I imagine this is way above even the 550 percent of the payday lender. Of course, if you are fortunate enough to have free overdraft protection as I do, there is very little fear or worry about this. I pay 8.9 percent annual interest on any money that I am short on in my account. So if I need \$100 on Monday and pay it back on Friday, I will pay back \$100.18. This is a perfect example of those who are wealthy, remaining so, but those who are poor having even the smallest gains taken from them by the rich. At first glance, this would seem like a better topic for reform, and in actuality it probably is, taken separately. But this is the problem; there are so many instances and examples of this type of debt oppression that it will take a major shift of reorder for any type of effective alleviation to take place.

Bishop and Theologian N.T. Wright has declared that Third World debt forgiveness is the most important issue of Christian ethics facing the Church and the

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob Goldstein, "Inside a Payday Loan Shop." *Planet Money* (audio blog), May 18, 2010, [http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/05/the\\_tuesday\\_podcast\\_payday\\_len.html](http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/05/the_tuesday_podcast_payday_len.html). (Accessed May 23, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> This is the current fee at the Glens Falls National Bank.

world today.<sup>19</sup> Truly there is no excuse, save for greed, that the World Bank, the IMF, and especially the government of the United States has not yet forgiven the debts of these Third World nations, who find their economies crippled by having to pay insurmountable amounts of debt to wealthy countries. The fact of the matter is that most of these countries have already paid back their loans; of the sixty poorest countries over \$550 billion has been repaid over the past thirty years on \$540 billion in loans, yet there is still a \$523 billion debt due, as of the summer of 2005.<sup>20</sup> Many of these debts are due to countries being forced to take large loans at very high rates when banks had an excess of money they wished to lend. In 2000 President Obasanjo of Nigeria was quoted, "All that we had borrowed up to 1985 or 1986 was around \$5 billion and we have paid about \$16 billion yet we are still being told that we owe about \$28 billion. That \$28 billion came about because of the injustice in the foreign creditors' interest rates. If you ask me what is the worst thing in the world, I will say it is compound interest."<sup>21</sup>

Today it is estimated that for every dollar received in grants in the Third World, thirteen dollars is spent repaying foreign debt. Perhaps the most appalling part of this is that there have been successful instances of debt cancellations in wealthy nations such as

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<sup>19</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008): 216-221.

<sup>20</sup> Anup Shah, "The Scale of the Debt Crisis — Global Issues." Global Issues : Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All — Global Issues, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/30/the-scale-of-the-debt-crisis>. (Accessed December 11, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Shah, "The Scale of the Debt Crisis." Also Daryl Collins writes that lending in poor nations between individual and micro-lending is always simple interest, e.g. a borrower taking out a \$100 loan at 20% interest would owe \$120, regardless of time-frame. This makes it really much more of a "fee" in our thinking. It also gives us perspective, as a 10% loan over 60 months for a new car would be the equivalent of a 27.5% simple loan. Daryl Collins et al., *Portfolios of the Poor How the World's Poor Live on \$2 a Day* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 136-7.

Germany and Poland.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the Third World is continuously denied debt cancellation even when there was a huge push worldwide leading up to the year 2000 to be the year of Jubilee, based on the biblical notion of Jubilee,<sup>23</sup> where debts are forgiven and land is returned. And even when nations are promised cancellation of debts as President Clinton did in 1999, strings are attached as to how that money must be spent.<sup>24</sup> One of the most destructive aspects of not forgiving debt is the continuous and devastating cycle that it has on the economy and businesses of those nations. Much of the agricultural "aid" that we send overseas to alleviate poverty and hunger benefits our own economy and drives farmers in those debtor nations out of business. We saw that recently in Haiti, following the 2010 earthquake where United States' rice was being sold cheaper than the rice that was grown locally. This caused a devastating blow to the Haitian farmer.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, a Jamaican entrepreneur, who wants to invest in his countrymen through microcredit loans, has to be far choosier than he would like, because he has lent most of his money to the Jamaican government in order for them to repay foreign debt.<sup>26</sup>

This debt is stifling in the same way it was stifling in Nehemiah's day. It is oppressing the people of the Third World, keeping them in perpetual poverty. There could be reform, but that would take generations. There needs to be a swift reorder. Third

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<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 109 cf.

<sup>23</sup> Leviticus 25:10.

<sup>24</sup> Shah, "The Scale of the Debt Crisis." It should be noted that the United States never followed through on this promise anyway.

<sup>25</sup> Adam Davidson and Caitlin Kenney, "How Foreign Aid Hurts Haitian Farmers." *Planet Money* (audio blog), June 10, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/06/10/127750586/how-foreign-aid-is-hurting-haitian-farmers>. (Accessed June 14, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Alex Blumberg, "The Billionaire and the Tire Repairman." *Planet Money* (audio blog), June 29, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2010/06/29/128195395/the-tuesday-podcast-the-billionaire-and-the-tire-repairman>. (Accessed July 3, 2010).

World nation debts must be cancelled and forgiven.<sup>27</sup> The United States and the other wealthy nations of the world must be generous with the foreign aid they promise, especially with regard to that aid which helps meet the Millennium Development Goals, which comprise eight areas of poverty eradication. Currently the U.S. gives one-fifth of their pledged promise of .7 percent GNP.<sup>28</sup> The real difficulty of this situation is, that this is not a case of just doing what is right, but this is even something most of the public also approves of. The average American thinks that the United States is spending twenty percent of our budget on foreign aid, and feels that this is too much. They believe it should be cut in half to ten percent. The reality is giving ten percent would quintuple the amount of money we are spending on foreign aid, which is presently at less than two percent.<sup>29</sup> In the shadow of our nation spending nearly a trillion dollars bailing out the wealthiest one percent of the world after they nearly destroyed the financial market, we certainly could afford to forgive a fraction of that amount to help one-third of the world's poorest citizens to be lifted out of extreme poverty.

### *The Community*

Not all instances of poverty alleviation must come through legislation or radical social measures. The early Christians demonstrated a strong desire to relieve poverty in their own community. They held everything in common and shared their resources with

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<sup>27</sup> "Debt and the Millennium Development Goals." Jubilee USA: HOME, <http://www.jubileeusa.org>. (Accessed December 11, 2010). The UK Finance Minister Gordon Brown stated that 67 countries would need 100% forgiveness of debt to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

<sup>28</sup> Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 302.

<sup>29</sup> And sadly much of this goes to military development, not economic development. Jeffrey Sachs, "Ending Poverty: World Poverty and Moral Responsibility." Address, Bonhoeffer Lectures, Union Theological Seminary, October 11, 2007.

one another; therefore, “there was not a needy person among them.”<sup>30</sup> In our capitalistic society this reeks of communism, which leads most people to dismiss this passage entirely. But there is an important theological element that brought them to this action: the recognition that nothing they had was their own.<sup>31</sup> This is the heart of stewardship, of giving, of our very relationship with God. Everything we have comes from the LORD. He has provided us with all that we have. He has promised to feed us, to clothe us, to care for us.<sup>32</sup> Nothing we have is actually ours; it is all a gift from God. So why do we rebel against this so much? There were problems of greed and sin creeping into even these early Christian communities as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who held back some of the proceeds from selling their land, and paid the price with their lives.<sup>33</sup> But even if we do not live in “communes,” the Christian community should strive to see themselves as stewards of God’s provisions, as opposed to possessors of them.

There are a great number of ways that churches and organizations can work together to address the needs of their communities. They can share resources of money, time, and facilities. Currently, the Catholic Church is holding services in the local Baptist church while its building is undergoing construction. More than that, two churches are actually considering sharing facilities because of the capital overhead involved in maintaining a church, especially one over 100 years old.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 4:34.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 4:32.

<sup>32</sup> Mathew 6:25-34.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 5:1-11.

<sup>34</sup> This may be one of the positive by-products of small churches fighting to stay alive. Because church buildings are so expensive to maintain, more and more are beginning to share worship space. This may be the first step to breaking down some of these other barriers and help more churches partner in ministry as well.



The problem we must face is that of possession and fear. Both individuals (clergy may be the worst offenders) and organizations need to overcome their fear and insecurity of working together and sharing resources. I have found this the most difficult aspect of trying to be an ecumenical force in the community. Every church is concerned with its own success, not necessarily for the Kingdom of God, or for the betterment of society, but for its own survival. This is not only true in churches. One of the major problems we need to overcome in our community is the fact the leaders of the local soup kitchen and another relief organization refuse to work together.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, they are replicating many of the same services...and although they are striving to achieve the same objectives of alleviating poverty, they are creating an atmosphere of competition as opposed to one of partnership. Our attitude must become that of partnering with one another to achieve the common objective of serving Christ in our community. There are some recent examples of the churches working together: last Christmas six churches each purchased 100 Christmas outreach packets that included Bibles, a devotional, and an invitation to Christmas Eve services, with all six churches' service times listed. This allowed us to distribute to 600 different residences, covering much of the downtown area. None could have afforded this on their own, but together we were able to achieve a common objective. Another example: because none of our churches has a large youth ministry, we partnered together in some events, which gave us the option of participating in activities we would not be able to do on our own.

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<sup>35</sup> The reasons for this are unclear. Some have stated personality conflicts are the cause, though many others have noted that it is largely ego and fear that keep the two from working together. I suspect that the latter is truer, as it mirrors the same type of competition and possessiveness that affect many other organizations, including city versus county government agencies.



The parable of the two draft horses exemplifies the concept of higher productivity when pulling together strength and resources. One draft horse is able to pull from one to three tons. The logical conclusion to draw for how much weight two draft horses could pull might be to add those two weights together: between two and six tons. One might even think they could pull a little more, perhaps pull eight tons or so together. But in actuality a tandem of draft horses working together can pull twelve to fourteen tons!!! That is more than four times what one could pull alone.<sup>36</sup> Even in the business-oriented, secular world of Major League Baseball there is revenue sharing among the teams in order to create a better over-all product.<sup>37</sup> In 1999 the revenues of the seven largest teams were more than double that of the fourteen smallest. MLB instituted a formula of revenue sharing which states that each team must pay thirty-one percent of their local revenue into a pool that will be evenly divided between the thirty teams. Also the shared revenue states that the smaller market teams, like Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and Florida will receive a disproportionately larger amount of the national revenues collected through media outlets in order to build up those clubs. So while this does not create a completely level playing field between the smaller and larger market cities, teams like the Florida Marlins have won the World Series because of shared revenue (and good management.) The point, of course, is that in order to achieve the greatest result in a common mission (improving the competition of Major League Baseball) these teams had to embrace the idea of pooling and sharing resources rather than hoard all of their wealth.

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<sup>36</sup> I have heard this story several times before, though have no clue when or where...but have found it quoted on this website Gary Simpson, "Parable of the Two Draft Horses by Gary Simpson Motivation & Self Esteem for Success." <http://searchwarp.com/swa16571.htm>. (Accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> David Jacobson, "MLB's Revenue-Sharing Formula | BNET." BNET - The CBS Interactive Business Network, July 14, 2008, <http://www.bnet.com/article/mlbs-revenue-sharing-formula/210897>. (Accessed October 9, 2010).

This is a concept that churches and other organizations are going to have to face, even embrace. Perhaps the biggest hurdle in all of this is the need for government, churches, and not-for-profits to all work together. The problems that our communities face concerning the realities that are associated with poverty: hunger, lack of healthcare, poor housing, unemployment, and under-education are not going to be conquered by any one organization. It will take communities committed to working together; willing to put aside ego, pool resources, and give up the ownership of those resources in order to make this happen. The fact is that nothing we have is our own. They are gifts from the LORD to build up His kingdom in the community around us. Let us work as congregations and communities, pooling these resources so that there “are no needy among us.”

### *The Individual*

Zacchaeus was a tax-collector, and although his name means pure and innocent, he was anything but that. Tax-collectors were designated as a special class of sinner. They not only worked for the Roman Empire and were thus seen as traitors to their nation, but they made their wealth by impoverishing others, often sending armies to invade the homes of those thought to be withholding goods. When Jesus was passing through town Zacchaeus desired to see the One that all had been talking about. Because he was short in stature he climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus. As Kenneth Bailey points out this was a good idea because a despised tax collector might not emerge from a crowd of people unscathed.<sup>38</sup> But this can also be taken figuratively as the nature of the character of Zacchaeus. He was a climber. And climbers will step over anyone who

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 170-185.

gets in their way in order to achieve their objective, to rise above everyone else.<sup>39</sup> Yet Jesus, when he saw this climber, this one who had put himself above others, this one who climbed to safety both physically and financially, said “Hurry and come down, I must stay at your house today.”<sup>40</sup>

This command from Jesus to “come down” pierces his heart. He experiences the grace of God, as there are surely many who are critical that Jesus chooses once again to “eat with a sinner.” Zacchaeus is led to immediate repentance, and more than that, to fulfilling the promise of his name as being one who is pure. He pledges to give half his wealth to the poor and to make up four-fold to all he has mistreated. Jesus pierced that fortress of wealth and power that had surrounded Zacchaeus, and in that encounter with the living God he is transformed.

This transformation is the reordering that takes place in and through the individual. When those of us who are “rich” and “powerful” experience the true power of the good news that Jesus Christ has brought into the world, we are made “poor.” That is, we are brought into that transforming reality that we are utterly and totally dependent upon God for everything. He is our maker. He is our creator. Jesus Christ became poor for the sole purpose of redeeming us, redeeming this creation and establishing his kingdom on this earth. When we embrace this Jesus, we become like him—poor and needy. And in this transformation of dependence, of being poor in spirit we are truly

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<sup>39</sup> Vitor Westhelle, “Exposing Zacchaeus,” *Christian Century* 123, no. 22 (October 31, 2006): 29.

<sup>40</sup> Luke 19:5.

blessed with the power of God's love.<sup>41</sup> There is a great verse in Proverbs where a man named Agur prays, "two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."<sup>42</sup>

This is the greatest struggle for people like Zacchaeus, for the rich of this world, for me; I am filled far past what is needful for me. I have far more than I need, if not more than I desire, and I am constantly at risk of saying "who is the LORD?" The fact that in my wealth I can meet all my immediate and apparent needs clouds the reality that I am poor and wretched in my spirit and need the good news of God's love in Jesus to redeem me and make me truly strong and rich in his kingdom. It is in this reality where we must embrace Jesus' words to "come down." Come down out of the fortresses that we have set up for ourselves. Our homes where we are protected from the outside world. Our cars where we can flee quickly away. Our schedules that we keep full, running this way and that so everyone, especially ourselves, knows how busy and important we are. These are all fortresses that not only can keep us from the world around us, but from the God who seeks to embrace us and save us. It is in "coming down" from these walls that we have erected to keep not only the world out, but also God himself, that our lives can become reordered and we might be transformed. It is only then that we might identify

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<sup>41</sup> Deborah C. Bowen, "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit: Imagining Excellence Otherwise," *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> Proverbs 30:7-9.

ourselves with those Jesus teaches as he begins his Sermon on the Mount, “blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs’ is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>43</sup>

This identification is important, because while much of the poverty alleviation that takes place will be done by groups, organizations, and governments, none of this will be possible without the commitment of the individual to desire to see justice and righteousness being carried out. This means that one must be involved, not on a peripheral and intellectual basis, but physically and relationally involved. In John Chrysostom’s Forty-fifth Homily in the Acts of the Apostles he addresses the church concerning the institutions that had been created to care for the poor, sick, and needy. He begins to criticize the church for these ministries, not because of their work, but because they have become avenues by which people can be disconnected from the realities of poverty. In other words, the institution which I support cares for these people, therefore I myself do not have to. They were instruments to keep the poor out of sight, and as St. Chrysostom says, to keep Christ, who has identified himself with the poor and stranger out of sight as well.<sup>44</sup> Chrysostom goes on to preach that just because the Church has the means to support to the poor, does that mean that you are excused from doing so? If the priest prays, does that mean you do not have to? If the church then cares for little ones, does that mean you do not have to welcome them into your own home?<sup>45</sup> Therefore we are called to reorder our lives as individuals by opening ourselves to God’s grace and love, to “come down” out of the material fortresses we have erected, embrace the living

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew 5:3.

<sup>44</sup> Westhelle, “Exposing Zacchaeus,” 30.

<sup>45</sup> John Chrysostom and Philip Schaff, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, 14 vols., series 11 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 276.

God, and embrace each of his children: fulfilling the command to accept one another as Christ has accepted us.<sup>46</sup>

The reordering of our lives is a key goal for us to strive toward as we seek to serve Christ and embark upon our course of responding to poverty alleviation. As I wrote above, not all poverty is created equal and therefore not all responses to poverty are equal as well. But what is constant, whether we respond in relief efforts, reform efforts, or reordering efforts is that hopefully our lives will have been reordered and transformed by God. The hope is that we will have been made poor, identified with the poor, and therefore, identified with Christ himself. It is this dependence upon Christ that will help us in our response to addressing poverty, because it will be Christ who leads us, guides us, and directs us as we seek to serve him, and all those whom He loves. That takes a great deal of pressure off of me, off of anyone who longs to be obedient in serving Christ. I do not have to do this in my own power, in fact I am not called to act on my own power, for apart from Christ I can do nothing;<sup>47</sup> I am simply called to act through the love of Jesus Christ. And in acting through the love of Christ, we can finally begin to take action.

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<sup>46</sup> Romans 15:7.

<sup>47</sup> John 15:5.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BE NOT AFRAID

Before specifically addressing the outcomes of our season of fasting and prayer, there are a couple of aspects of poverty alleviation that are interwoven through each type of response that must be mentioned. One is relationships, which I will address in a future chapter. The other is repentance. Before we can truly engage the poor of the world, we must be willing to repent. We see this in Zacchaeus; we see this in Nehemiah; and if the governments of the world choose to forgive and cancel Third World debt we would see it there as well. Repentance is not easy. It signifies that someone was wrong. In error. Mistaken. Going in the wrong direction. It is difficult to admit that we were wrong (at least it is for me). Many people like to deflect blame, make excuses, or simply want to start over without ever admitting fault or error. But repentance is vital for addressing this issue. Most, if not all of us, are certainly guilty of not fully depending upon God for our needs. And as such, has brought us to a place where we ask “who is the LORD?” We must repent from this. More importantly we are guilty of turning a blind eye to the injustices that occur in our world. The example of Nehemiah is a powerful one. He repented before the officials and before the people and said, “what I was doing was not right. What we are doing is wrong, and it needs to stop.” This is a powerful example, and yet is so simple. Simple, in that, it is not complicated. Not simple, meaning easy. Because repentance is never easy. It means going in a totally different direction from the one in which we are currently heading. This can be extremely scary. The good news is that Jesus is there to lead us and guide us as we travel down that new path of righteousness.

It is this new path of righteousness where we begin presently. As stated in chapter one, the Community Meal ministry was beyond any quick fixes or minor tweaking. It was in need of a complete overhaul and a new vision. Before any additional addressing of poverty within the community, we needed a *reordering*; a dismantling of the present situation and system in order to fully address the needs around us, as well as the way that we as a congregation could meet those needs. As a parish we entered into a season of prayer and fasting about the future of this ministry. Specifically, we were seeking God's guidance in answering three major questions:

- ✧ Should we move the Community Meal from noontime to the evening?
- ✧ Should we add a worship service targeted to the community?
- ✧ And how can we structure ourselves to help prevent this crisis from recurring?<sup>1</sup>

Through our prayers, the Lord's response to these questions would set the path for all of our considerations and decisions concerning the Community Meal ministry, the largest one being that of the meal time.

The question of moving the Community Meal from noontime to the evening was not one of preference for when the Sunday meal is consumed. There was a ladder progression of issues that eventually addressed the core element of concern. We would move the Community Meal primarily to attract more teams, more participants, and outside groups or organizations. This would also enable us to have a worship service

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, there was a fourth question which would have rendered the other questions moot, namely, Lord, do you want this ministry to die, because there is something else you want this congregation to do? This question was asked and overwhelmingly and immediately the answer seemed to be "No, I want this ministry to continue." This was helpful, as it allowed the parish to fully focus on the other three questions.



before the meal, but that was a secondary issue.<sup>2</sup> In attracting outside groups and team members we would cease to follow the regulation that all food needed to be prepared on-site. In eliminating that rule, we would no longer be eligible to receive food at discounted rates from the Food Bank. This meant that we would be paying much more money to prepare the dinners, which ultimately led to the crux of the problem: fear. How would we pay for it? From where would all this money come? Would the vestry and congregation support it? This, without a doubt, was the biggest concern that people had about moving the meal and dropping the Food Bank, and this presented a major challenge for us.<sup>3</sup>

This is not surprising, because overcoming fear and trusting in the Lord is one of the most common challenges that each of us faces in our lives. I still have a vivid memory of my New Testament professor, Dr. Rodney Whitacre, asking the class what command Jesus most often made in the gospel. After several guesses like “love,” “proclaim,” “heal,” and “go,” he told us that it was “do not fear.” Repeatedly Jesus tells his disciples and those following him to not be afraid. Do not fear the demons, the world, the Romans, the elements, or even death. Jesus addresses the type of fear we were experiencing clearly in his Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider

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<sup>2</sup> All three of these questions overlap or are dependent on some component of the others to some extent, like a Venn diagram.

<sup>3</sup> There have been a few parishioners since this time that have recently told me that they also were afraid people would not come back out at night to help cook and serve after being in church in the morning. I, honestly have no recollection of this concern. Most likely I was dismissive of it in comparison to the fear about money.

the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:25-34).

Namely, when we seek the kingdom of God, our needs will be met. If God cares and provides for the birds and the lilies, how much more then will He care and provide for us? How much more will He bless us when we are reaching out to feed the hungry? These questions and God's assurance through the words of Jesus are key considerations when we encounter challenges and they were certainly part of ours.

There may be many reasons not to transition the meal to the evening, but fear should not be one of them. In fact, John writes "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."<sup>4</sup> The perfect love that we have is from the Lord. This addresses again that very first *reordering* that must take place, and that is the one which is within each of us. We must repent and turn away from our fear of trusting in the Lord, and allow him to reorder our lives. It is not only a *reordering* whereby we understand that we are poor in Spirit and must reach out in love and grace to those around us, but a *reordering* where we come to fully embrace and trust the living God to provide for our needs. This *reordering* must take place not only on an individual level, but on the community level as well. The congregation and the vestry must understand the need for *reordering* would include a financial component as there would be an increased cost and investment for this ministry.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:18a.

The budget line would need to be readjusted. For a church that already operates in a deficit budget this is not a small matter. Would we seek first the kingdom of God? Would we overcome our fears? Would we trust in the Lord to provide? These are the real considerations that surrounded moving the time of the meal as well as other changes and questions that needed to be addressed.

The second question we were seeking an answer to in this season of prayer was that of adding a worship service that was targeted to the community attending the dinners. The question of adding another service was also multi-layered. At this time there was currently a Saturday evening service. This was not a large service, but on average thirty faithful people attended each week. It was inevitable that if we were going to introduce a new service on Sunday evening it would mark the elimination of this Saturday service, because I would not be able to take on another service. Frankly, I was barely able to handle them all as it was.<sup>5</sup> I imagined that most of those in attendance would come to one of the other services, either the early morning service that is nearly identical to the Saturday service or the Sunday evening service if evenings were more convenient. But this was not a certainty and was definitely one of several major pastoral considerations as we prayed about the addition of a worship service.

As we dealt with the pastoral question of eliminating one service, we were also faced with a pastoral question of adding or not adding another service. Should we create, establish and promote an opportunity for the poor to come to worship? If so, what form

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the Saturday service, we have two Sunday morning services a Wednesday service, and celebrate the major feast days when they occur.

should that worship service take, at least in broad strokes? The first question required being answered in the affirmative in order to even pose the second. The answer to the first question seemed obvious, at least theologically. Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth by declaring those words from Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>6</sup> And he ended it by commanding his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to obey everything that [he] commanded [them.]”<sup>7</sup> In between these teachings Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God to virtually every type of person imaginable: children, the Samaritan woman, the lepers, the demon-possessed and tax collectors. It appears that the message of the kingdom of God is for everyone.

Although theologically constant, it is surprising how culture (including some in the Church) opposes mixing outreach and evangelism. There had been criticism from some at the first suggestion of creating a service to target those who come to the dinners. They saw it as forcing people to worship in order to eat. First, there are leaders of a couple of organizations in the city of Albany with whom I have spoken that do exactly that. Attendees go to service, receive a card, which is then redeemed for a meal. According to the director of one ministry there are rarely complaints from the people they serve—it’s the way it is<sup>8</sup> (although they get grief from the media from time to time). Nevertheless, that was not even what we were proposing; no one had to come to worship

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 4:18-19 from Isaiah 61:1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>8</sup> Perry Jones, director of Capital City Rescue Mission, Albany NY.

to get dinner. But was it our obligation to provide a place and medium whereby they could be fed the message of God's Good News in addition to being fed physically? As Jesus warned the crowds who followed after the feeding of the 5000:

You are following me not because of miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you...I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never hunger and he who believes in me will never thirst. (John 6:26-27, 35).

This is a message not just for the crowds, but for the Church. While we should certainly feed the hungry, we cannot neglect to give people the "bread of life," Jesus, which endures forever.

Throughout the gospels we note that Jesus is not satisfied with "social action," but declares the message of salvation to all that he encounters. So it would seem impossible to separate the power and grace of caring for the poor, sick, and needy without proclaiming to them the good news that they are sons and daughters of the Lord and that they are invited, indeed are welcomed, into his kingdom. In his book *A Quiet Revolution*, John Perkins emphasizes the importance of sharing the words of life in Christ along with the meeting their physical needs. He writes that there is a generally a cause and effect relationship with both the spiritual and physical needs in the life of the poor and that it is "cruel" to share one without the other.<sup>9</sup>

In answering the first question positively that it was appropriate to have a worship service that targeted those who come to dinner, a secondary question emerged concerning the form this service should take. As stated earlier this service would replace a Saturday

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<sup>9</sup> John Perkins, *A Quiet Revolution*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), 66.

service, which had no music and was fairly traditional. Many of the people who came were long-time church attendees, who preferred Saturday night for a variety of reasons. The focus of this service could not be on life-long churchgoers but would need to be more evangelistic because we surmised that people who were un-churched from the community would be a part of this service. This would mean creating a shift in the development of the service, which would not be creating a liturgy suited for life-long Episcopalians—but rather focus on reaching out to the lost and inviting them into the presence of the living God. My conviction was that we would do that best by example, through our own worship of Jesus Christ. Brian Doerksen, renowned worship leader says, “when I stand before people to lead worship, I know full well that I am not able to convince anyone to worship God by trying to talk them into it or by stirring their emotions. My first desire is to worship God myself.”<sup>10</sup> This is our call—to lead people into worship, not through arguments or convincing, but through worshipping the living God ourselves. When people see the transformation and authenticity of Christ in our lives, they might desire it for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

One of the foundational passages for worship can be found in Isaiah chapter 6:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King,

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<sup>10</sup> Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism :Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 102.

<sup>11</sup> While this section is very short, much of the thinking behind it can be attributed to Morgenthaler.

the LORD Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:1-8).

This passage from Isaiah offers a powerful insight into the glory and majesty of God Almighty, the power of healing and forgiveness, and the receiving of God's mission and purpose. These aspects are all inter-related. Isaiah experiences the glory of God—he sees the Seraphs singing praises to God, and in this experience recognizes his own sin and unworthiness. He then receives the cleansing and atonement as his lips are touched with the burning coal from the altar. Finally, Isaiah cleansed from his sin, hears the voice of the Lord calling, and answers that call.

This is worship. We come into the presence of almighty God—and even though we fall far short in contrast to the perfect glory of the Lord, we receive the promise of the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ and the strength of the Holy Spirit. Through that healing we are brought closer to God and perhaps into a better hearing of the Lord's voice calling us to follow him. His call comes in a variety of ways, for a variety of purposes, but the Lord heals us for his purpose so that we might hear his call and follow his ways. As Paul proclaims, "Present yourself as a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable in his sight for this is your spiritual act of worship."<sup>12</sup> Allowing people to experience the glory of the almighty God and experience the power of his forgiveness is a major emphasis (as it probably should be at all worship services.) For us, in our Anglican tradition, this would be done through biblical and evangelistic preaching, music, confession and absolution, the laying on of hands for healing, anointing with oil,

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 12:1b.



and receiving the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. In summary it would be a service where people are permitted and encouraged to actively participate in worship and experience God's transforming love and power. The question remained would we allow God to reorder our worship practice and focus?

The final question we sought to address was that of re-structuring ourselves in leadership in order to prevent a similar crisis in another few years. Before we were able to effectively answer that question we had to open ourselves up once again to being *reordered*. This time it was not a matter of deeper trust in God's provision or openness in liturgy and worship, but in addressing the deep-rooted obstacles that effect how Church was done. In The Church of the Messiah there were two that predominantly impacted us: clericalism and individualism.

The obstacle of overcoming the clergy-driven culture within the local parish that had existed for centuries would not be an easy task. Since the days of Constantine, professional clerics began to replace the people in doing the ministry. Even the Reformation did not truly address or correct this problem. According to author George Hunter the role of clergy was just re-directed. At a recent conference he said, "The role of the Medieval priest was to care for the people, hear confessions and give absolution, and place the body and blood of Christ on the peoples tongues. The role of the Reformation pastor was to care for the people, counsel the hurting, and put the word of God into the people's ears."<sup>13</sup> Either way the ministry of importance was reserved for the professional

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<sup>13</sup> George G. Hunter, "Turning the Ship Around" (address, Episcopal Diocese of Albany Clergy Conference, Christ the King Spiritual Life Center, Greenwich, NY, September 28, 2005).



cleric. Hunter writes, “with the clear exceptions like monarchs, politicians, rock stars, super-jocks, and supermodels, [clergy] have exceeded most other vocations in the degree to which they have assumed that the world revolves around what they do.”<sup>14</sup> He attributes much of this to books such as Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor*,<sup>15</sup> which while holding valuable spiritual nuggets heaped enormous expectations on local pastors to visit everyone, preach every time, be everything to everybody. This book, which is 350 years old, helped create a core value system for what it means to be a professional clergy person—which is that it is all on you. It is this reality that clergy must combat, and recover the biblical theology of lay leadership and ministry. In fact, one priest has repeatedly stated that those who are about to be ordained are not “going into the ministry,” rather they are leaving the ministry to become equippers of others to do the ministry.<sup>16</sup> This is consistent with what St. Paul proclaims in Ephesians, “It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for the works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Those who are set apart are called to equip the saints for the building and unity of the Church, not do all the work and ministry themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> George G. Hunter, *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 106.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor, Or, The Duty of Personal Labors for the Souls of Men* (New York: Mason & Lane, 1837).

<sup>16</sup> Mike Flynn, “Lecture Two” (lecture, Episcopal of Diocese Priests’ Retreat, Niskayuna, NY, November 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13.

While it has been true that a good many lay members were involved in the leadership and function of this ministry, the reality is that the Community Meal became a weekly ministry of the church because the priest stood at the altar and proclaimed that this ministry would be taking place. In order for this ministry to survive and thrive, it must be embraced by the parish as a whole. There must be ownership and excitement that springs forth, not simple obedience and obligation from the priest's say so.

The second cultural obstacle that existed was that of individualism, at least to the extent that only one person does the lion's share of the work. Previously shared were statements about all of the duties of the coordinator as well as about the team leaders who substituted continuously for every vacancy in the schedule rotation. These were not isolated instances, but a pattern where one person did most of the work until they were exhausted or stretched thin. The willingness to share the load, teach and empower others to participate in the ministry, and actually ask for help before a crisis point would be crucial in order to ensure the success of this ministry. The leadership of the Community Meal ministry would need to work side-by-side with new team members in order to pass along their knowledge, rather than simply do the work themselves.

A good example of this process is related by Mike Flynn, who compares the process of discipleship with that of apprenticeship. He relates how his father showed him how to tie flies for fishing lures. First, his father tied the flies himself. Then as Mike became interested, he watched his father. Next he began to help his father tie the flies. Soon after, Mike was tying the flies with his father helping him. After he got good at it,

his father simply watched. Finally Mike tied the flies all by himself.<sup>18</sup> He shares this story to demonstrate how the Church should bring people into discipleship and leadership, slowly and gradually, and by their sides, lending support and encouragement.

Reviewing the history of most leadership transitions at The Church of the Messiah, using that same example would look something like this: Mike's father tied flies. After many years Mike's father did not feel like tying flies any longer, so he got Mike to do it. The end. In order for this ministry to work effectively and for the long term there must be a *reordering* of how we view ministry and leadership. This cannot be one person's ministry. This will need to be the effort of a team, perhaps several teams who are committed to serving the living God in this ministry.

At the close of the forty days of prayer and fasting, on the Feast of Pentecost, we met as a congregation to share what we discerned God saying to us and address the questions and concerns discussed in this chapter. While there was still some unease and trepidation from some, there was clear sense from most that we were to proceed. We would seek to move the meal to the evening and cease our relationship with the Food Bank in order to draw more individuals, teams, and organizations into helping. We would forgo the Saturday evening service and seek to create a Sunday evening worship service which preceded the meal, specifically targeted to the community. Finally, throughout the summer a leadership team would be formed to help bring about these changes and prepare us for the next chapter of this ministry's life.

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<sup>18</sup> Mike Flynn, *Making Disciples: Following Jesus' Model*, (Aurora, CO: FreshWind Ministries, 1997), 39-43.

During these forty days God did a mighty act in *reordering* The Church of the Messiah. This was a necessary beginning as we embarked on this new initiative. This initiative would be *reordered* as well. For no longer was this only about serving a meal, but about serving a community. And as Saul's name was changed to Paul in the book of Acts, on this day the Community Meal became the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MEMBERS OF THE BODY

While the season of prayer was vital to our reordering the Fellowship Dinner ministry, it was by no means complete. There was the sense of commitment, encouragement, and support to embark in a new direction, but there was still much work that needed to be accomplished. Even if there was a general feeling of optimism, the questions of “who was going to do all of this?” and “how would it come together?” were hanging in the air. As stated in the last chapter, this was a ministry that needed to be led by multiple people, who were committed to this vision and ministry. This led to the creation of a ministry leadership team for the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

It is vital to define what a ministry leadership team is. A healthy Christian ministry leadership team is a small group of diversely gifted leaders who are committed to one another and to a common vision of God. In leading a larger group of people into this vision with a specific plan of meaningful ministry and expected transformative results, they hold one another accountable to joyfully serve for the glory and honor of God.<sup>1</sup> In this definition there are eight pieces that need to be highlighted.

1. *Small Group.* While for this ministry it will be vital to have an enormous number of hands working, if everyone was involved at a leadership aspect it would be disaster. The leadership team needs to be small and manageable, with one person responsible for a specific aspect of the ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is a combination of Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team: Five Traits of Vital Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005) and George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership: Achieving Success through Shared Responsibility*, (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 24.

2. *Diversely Gifted.* Specifically looking at 1 Corinthians 12 illustration that the Church is like a human body, we do not need a team made up of all eyes, hands, etc. We do need one where a variety of gifts and personalities exist and thrive.
3. *Leaders.* This is the one of the most difficult practical issues for the Church. It is not satisfactory to just have warm bodies who are willing to serve in a leadership position. They must be leaders who can draw others into sharing a common vision with them and carrying out the established ministry plan.
4. *Committed to One Another.* Trust is a major aspect of a healthy team, and is vital to its success. The team members must commit to love, honor, and trust each other. There will be times of conflict, there will be times of discouragement and setback, and teams that commit to one another are able to attack the problems rather than each other.
5. *Common Vision of the Lord.* This is a key statement. There must be a common vision, for the team, for the team to express to the ministers, for the ministers to express to the parish, for the parish to express to the world. A common vision not only makes it easier to gain support, it creates a solid returning point to those inevitable “bunny trails” that distract us from the main objective.
6. *Specific Plan.* The leadership team is responsible for creating and establishing a specific plan in order to carry out the vision and ministry. This may be the easiest although most time-consuming aspect. Yet it is amazing how either a) this step is omitted, perhaps because it is time-consuming, or b) this step is undertaken before the vision or anything else has been established.

7. *Mutual Accountability.* This has got to be the most difficult aspect of the definition, especially in our Western culture where many do not want to be held accountable—and most do not want to confront. Making the degree of difficulty exponentially greater is the fact that these are nearly always volunteers to whom we are referring, not paid staff. In order for true trust, true relationships, and true results to occur accountability is a must.
8. *For the Glory and Honor of God.* In the camp that I attended when I was growing up, there were competition times against other teams. When the competition was over we would cheer “2-4-6-8 who do we appreciate...,” followed by shouting out a response to the question “and who gets the glory?”—“JESUS!!!” This, along with a common vision from the Lord, is perhaps the most important aspect. It keeps everything in perspective. This is not about me, not about you, not even about those to whom we minister—it is about the Lord God. It is for his honor and his glory that we do what we do. It is our response to his love for us, that we give of ourselves. And when that aspect disappears, possessiveness emerges—and idolatry follows. No longer does the glory belong to the Lord, but to the program, or to us.

Before looking at the biblical and theological framework for establishing this sort of leadership team, one other element must be briefly examined—the difference between a task or work group and a team. There are a variety of minor distinctions between the two but leadership, community, and continuity stand out as being major differences. Most work groups have one, strong clearly focused leader, who knows the vision and knows

the direction. The other members of the group are certainly helpful, often invaluable to completing the task at hand, but they are clearly not the leader. Contrast this with the shared leadership roles and mutual accountability that exists in a leadership team. There is not just one defined leader, but a team of leaders working together to serve a common purpose.

The second major difference is community. Leadership teams care for each other, they invest time building up their relationships and trust with one another. They are as important as the task at hand and the ministry to be accomplished. This is definitely not so with a work group. The task always comes first, and the sooner the group can accomplish their task and goal the better.

The final major difference is continuity or perhaps even longevity. One leadership team is not established purely for start-up, and another for supervision, and then another for evaluation. The leadership team is generally established for a long-term ministry process of evaluation and adjustment. This does not mean that there will not be replacements needed or that the ministry will continue forever, but there is a sense that this is something that will extend beyond what can presently be seen. For example, the story of Nehemiah and others re-building the walls of Jerusalem is often espoused as a theological defense for team ministry. However, this was an event that was completed in only fifty-two days. Truly, a marvelous and glorious event that obviously had the divine



hand of God upon it, but nevertheless was finished in less than two months. I am not sure that this qualifies as an example of team ministry.<sup>2</sup>

This does not mean that the Nehemiah account is not helpful in creating a theological foundation for team ministry and leadership teams. In fact, it allows us amazing insight into God's kingdom plan. God, himself is the ultimate team: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons. One God. "And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal."<sup>3</sup> Each Person of the Trinity has a different role, but they are defined not by their role, but who they are. Together the creation of the world came into being, the atonement for sin was made and accepted, the Church established, gifts imparted, and a kingdom prepared. We, who are called by God, are called to be imitators of God.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in reality, there is no need to continue developing a theological framework for imitating God would naturally lead to team ministry. But let us review the Scriptures to gain a better and perhaps more practical grasp on this reality.

For from the beginning of creation we see this reality being proclaimed to Adam and Eve:

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<sup>2</sup> Frankly, I believe that this account fails the other two aspects as well. This was definitely Nehemiah's vision and not a shared leadership role, even though a great many other leaders were responsible for a portion of the wall. Also the task of rebuilding the wall far outweighed any sort of community or mutual care. While this is definitely an example of utilizing talents and gifts around you, and not being able to do it all your own, it falls short of being team ministry.

<sup>3</sup> "The Creed of Saint Athanasius," in *The Book of Common Prayer: And Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America : Together with the Psalter, or Psalms of David*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 864.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:1.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth," (Genesis 1:26-28).

Together Adam and Eve were to be a team. They were created in the image of God. They had complementary skills, we can assume, since together they reflected the image of God.<sup>5</sup> They were given a long-range vision by God, to rule over the fish, the birds, and every other creature—which includes naming them as we see in Genesis 2. They were also given the charge to be parents, to reproduce and fill the earth. Adam and Eve, a small group, were called to function as a healthy ministry team. However, something went awry—sin. Sin corrupted and distorted God's creation. And we see the effect of this reality throughout the Old Testament.

As already stated, Nehemiah was an effective leader who gathered other leaders to complete the re-building of the walls of Jerusalem. This and other Old Testament accounts testify to the need for working together based on a common purpose for the glory of God, but few and perhaps only one, could be classified as leadership teams. Noah built an Ark with his sons; Moses led Israel out of slavery in Egypt; Joshua and his army conquered the Promised Land; the Judges delivered Israel against foreign armies; David killed Goliath and became Israel's greatest king; and Solomon built the Temple.

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<sup>5</sup> For an incredibly wild and secular vision of this reality—read Greg Iles, *The Footprints of God*. (Scribner: New York, 2003).

All of these figures accomplished God's purposes with the help of those around them, with a couple exceptions, like Samson or David vs. Goliath, but there is little to suggest that they worked like a team. In fact, just the opposite is true. These figures were the leaders. There is never any doubt about who was in charge. There may be shared responsibilities in some cases, but there is little to no evidence of shared leadership. The primary reason for this was due to rarity by which people encountered the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit descended upon individuals generally one at a time, for a specific purpose or season. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon to lead Israel against the Midianites.<sup>6</sup> The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, who did evil in the sight of the Lord and came upon David when Samuel anointed him.<sup>7</sup> The empowering through the Spirit of the Lord was vital in each situation; however, the Spirit of the Lord was not limited to dealing only with individuals, but appeared to groups at a single time as well.

The one instance where it appears that many received the Spirit of the Lord at the same time is found in the book of Numbers. In Exodus 18, Jethro tells Moses that he is burning himself out—he is the judge for everyone—and he needs to spread out the workload and assign other judges to help him out. So with the Lord's guidance, Moses appoints seventy elders to share the workload with him. And as they gathered before the Tent, the Spirit fell upon them and they prophesied—but just that one time.<sup>8</sup> It is hard to discern how much this imitated team ministry from the Scriptures. But it is certainly possible that Moses, especially with so many other responsibilities, could have shared the leadership roles here. This certainly is a continuous ministry that they are serving in,

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<sup>6</sup> Judges 6:34.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Samuel 16:13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 11:25.

although one could hardly say that seventy is a small group. But they were also to organize themselves into sub-groups. It is interesting and not coincidental that the best instance of team ministry coincides with many receiving the Spirit of the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

As we might anticipate, with the coming of Jesus there is a shift in emphasis returning us to God's original plan and intention. Jesus gathers a band of twelve followers to teach and train. This is certainly as diverse a group as one might find anywhere. A zealot and a tax collector? Fishermen? Jesus demonstrates the sharing of leadership in a couple of ways. The first comes in his relationship to the Father through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus exclaims his unity with the Father, that they are one, that no one comes to the Father but through him, that those who see him see the Father.<sup>10</sup> At the same time Jesus prepares his disciples to be a team, focusing them not on the things of the world, but of God. He sends them out two by two to do the work of the kingdom of God. They feed the 5000. The climax to this preparation comes on the night before his death, where Jesus washes his disciples' feet; gives them the command to love another as he has loved them; and says that they are no longer servants, but friends—for he has revealed all the Father has made known to him.<sup>11</sup> All that Jesus has taught, shared, and demonstrated about the Father and the Kingdom of God is being transferred to the disciples. Jesus is going to the cross and grave; to new life and the Father. The disciples are left with one another; with the teachings of Jesus; and

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<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2010): 312. While the Spirit of the Lord was present in the Old Testament, it was scarce compared with the outpouring that came on the Day of Pentecost.

<sup>10</sup> John 6:46; 10:30; 14:6.

<sup>11</sup> John 13-15.

with the responsibility for proclaiming the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

Luckily for them, they will have help.

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples received a dramatic explosion of confidence and effectiveness as they became filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. From this point team ministry is seen as the norm in the Bible. Jesus Christ has come to take away the sin of the world, the Holy Spirit has come to empower, lead, and guide the world into truth. While creation has not been completely restored, nor will be until the return of Christ, God's new covenant has been established and is available through Jesus. The Holy Spirit, originally just given to a few, is now available to all who seek him through the glory of Jesus. In the power of the Spirit the early church works as a team. Under the leadership of Peter and the others, the mission of the Church began exploding. Perhaps the best glimpse we can get about this is in Acts 13-20. Throughout this eight chapter/ seven year period Paul's ministry team is diverse, changing, but constantly focused on the common mission of bringing the gospel to the world. The teams are generally small in number. They are made up of Jews and Gentiles, men and women. Below is a listing of the membership of the ministry teams:

- 13:3 - Barnabas, Paul and John Mark (Barnabas as team leader (first named) - mentoring and developing Paul)
- 13:13 - John Mark leaves them (Team divides as John Mark returns to Jerusalem)
- 15:22 - Silas and Judas added (Paul now inherits leadership from Barnabas - Barnabas now mentor on the team, and also therefore a team member. Add two newcomers for developing)
- 15:37-40 - Barnabas and John Mark, Paul and Silas (Team division through disagreement leads to two teams. Although teams break down, we see Barnabas and Paul both resolved to continue the work.)
- 16 - Timothy and Luke added (narrative changes to we. Timothy will be one of Paul's most significant emerging leaders.)

- 18 - Priscilla and Aquila added (Paul initially works with Priscilla and Aquila. Later joined by Timothy and Silas)
- 19:22 - Timothy and Erastus sent out by Paul much as Jesus sent out the disciples two by two.
- 20:4 - A broad team has now developed, again with many newcomers (Soapater, Aristarchus, Tychicus etc). Team is diverse : Thessalonians, Asians, Soapater from Beroea.<sup>12</sup>

Even in the best of ministry teams there is conflict and dissension as seen by Barnabas and Paul going their separate ways in chapter 15 in a dispute over taking back John Mark.<sup>13</sup> One could argue that the disagreement was more about a difference in opinion about accountability. However, the mission and vision remained constant. It is also obvious that as one reads the letters of Paul, there is great joy and love had for each of these members. There is more than just the focus on accomplishing a task, but rather a sense of community, relationships, shared vision, and behaving as a leadership team.

Finally, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages the church to work as a team:

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that

<sup>12</sup> The Teal Trust, "Team Membership," <http://teal.org.uk/et/page3.htm>. (Accessed May 14, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Although obviously this relationship healed as well considering Paul asked John Mark to come be with him in 2 Timothy 4:11.

there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:14-27).

The Church is indeed a diverse place, perhaps not as diverse as the original twelve—but we are filled with a variety of gifts and personalities that enable us to reach the world with joy in order to glorify God. One gift is not better than another, and we need to rely upon one another in order to live into our true calling and to achieve God’s ultimate goal for us. But, in the midst of the passage on diversity within the Church that gets quoted so often, we can overlook the preamble which focuses us on our unity. “For we were baptized by the one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”<sup>14</sup> And it is this one Spirit that binds us into the one body that calls us to work together as one. And one might assume it is the one Spirit that enables us to work together for the glory of God at all. There is no direct mention of team leadership in the Bible, but there is much that calls us to dependence upon one God, dependence upon one another, and away from a “Lone-Ranger” mentality. As the Lord said in the beginning, “It is not good for man to be alone.”<sup>15</sup>

In like fashion, The Church of the Messiah’s process of forming a ministry leadership team began. One of the most important aspects, although not very time consuming was that of recruitment. One only needs to look to Jesus for evidence of this. Jesus spent hours praying over the choice of his disciples—this was after all the future of the spread of the Kingdom of God—but recruitment was little more than, “follow me.”

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 2:18.



Therefore, while the actual recruiting did not take long, I had to pray that God might lead me to the proper people.<sup>16</sup> It is impossible to undervalue the importance of this first step. These needed to be people passionate about the Lord; who could give a commitment to this ministry; and who had an ability to grow and risk as a group member. Also, as was stated in the previous section, these people should be seen as leaders. After a period of prayer, I reached out to six people and they agreed to join me in creating a leadership team for the Fellowship Dinner Ministry. This team included the present coordinator, the coordinator of our food pantry (not connected to the other ministry), a cooking team leader, and three others who were interested in the idea and ministry (one of whom is our present organist/worship leader). Together we prepared to embark upon a journey of transformation for ourselves and the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

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<sup>16</sup> Mike Flynn, *Making Disciples: following Jesus' Model*, (Aurora, CO: FreshWind Ministries, 1997), 23-27.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A WISE MAN BUILDS ON THE ROCK

The road to transformation was not to be a leisurely one. There was much to discern and accomplish in a relatively short period of time, and the ministry leadership team began meeting weekly throughout the summer of 2005. The meetings followed a typical formula of:

- I. Devotion/Bible Study
- II. A Discussion on Leadership Team Principles<sup>1</sup>
- III. Mission and Vision Of Ministry// Role Creation and Discussion<sup>2</sup>
- IV. Prayer

This structure afforded us the opportunity to grow in community, to listen to the Lord, and also determine the vision and direction this ministry would take. It also created the structure in which we could achieve the two major stages that were set before us that summer: *foundation* and *implementation* of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> These principles included, but were not limited to vision, communication, conflict resolution, service, and accountability. The following resources were instrumental for this training: George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership: Achieving Success through Shared Responsibility* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), Rodney Cooper, "Hidden Blessings: Developing Leadership Effectiveness Through Healthy Management Conflict" (lecture, Advancing the Church Class Notes, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, June 2005), Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team: Five Traits of Vital Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), Pat MacMillan, *The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), Sue Mallory, "Challenges of Building an Equipping Team" (lecture, 2004 National Pastor's Convention, Nashville, TN, May 20, 2004), and E. Stanley Ott, *Transform Your Church with Ministry Teams* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The first weeks were spent discussing the mission and vision of ministry and after that focused upon the roles that needed to be developed.

The foundation stage is self-explanatory, as it laid the foundation for what the ministry was going to look like and what components it would entail. There were four elements in the foundation stage: developing a common vision, determining the measured risk, creating work elements of leadership roles, and establishing a specific plan of action. Without a doubt the developing of a common vision would be the most important element that needed to be accomplished. The vision would be the driving force of this entire ministry and would determine the direction of every following element. However, it seemed like every time the group started too far down the path of vision, the roadblock of fear or anxiety would cripple us. Before we were able to focus on that common vision fully we needed to discuss the idea of taking a measured risk.<sup>3</sup>

A measured risk is one that evaluates the likelihood and magnitude of taking that risk. Taking a measured risk means neither acting recklessly, nor concerned with the most cautious avenue. For many on our team the financial burden that making this change was creating a major barrier. There was also a major concern of how this change would be received by the current teams and the community at large. Would the congregation embrace this new vision, because many in the past had steered clear of this ministry? The discussion on measured risk was the hurdle we needed to leap over to finally break through to addressing the vision that God was calling us into. We came to the conclusion that this ministry is already in crisis. As a group we were attempting a radical new concept to give new life to this ministry. If it failed or if nobody got on board, then maybe it was time to have a giant celebration and say “God has blessed this ministry for nearly a decade and the time has come to say it is over.” But, this ministry

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<sup>3</sup> Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership*, 125.

cannot continue in the direction it is currently heading. This was a major turning point. I think finally there was an understanding that we were embarking on this mission in order for God to do something new in this valuable ministry. And if it failed, then so what? How could it be worse than what was currently happening? This was a *measured* risk. We were not looking to throw everything about the Community Meal away, but we were attempting to adjust several aspects in order to bring new energy and interest into an important and vital ministry.

With the commitment to willingly take on measured risks for this ministry we were able to focus on the common vision that God was leading us into. At this point it is important to revisit the beginning of chapter five, which stipulated that there were two elements that could be seen in each response of poverty alleviation. In that chapter we discussed repentance. The other is relationships. Relationships are a vital component to everything that takes place within the church. Jesus Christ died specifically to restore our broken relationship to the Father and straighten out our relationships with one another.<sup>4</sup> Relationships are foundational for any sort of long term process of poverty alleviation. This is true even in the cases of relief. In relief one can ask people their name; talk to them; and pray for them.

Even in the case of the young mother looking for food, mentioned in chapter three, there was a relationship that was being established. That relationship might not have been as deep as one the woman or the author would have liked, but it was a small one nonetheless. And it is that desire which is so important. We need to desire to be in

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop Edward Salmon, "Leadership" (lecture, Diocesan Leadership Seminar, Christ the King Spiritual Life Center, Greenwich, NY, January 10, 2012).

relationship with those whom we serve, to get to know them, to walk with them, to share with them. Indeed the ultimate goal of addressing poverty is not to be continuously ministering to the poor, but to become partners with them in order to truly alleviate and work toward eradicating the nature of poverty.

Letty Russell has proposed three tables as an image for this partnership.<sup>5</sup> The first table is a round table, which signifies that Christ has come to establish his kingdom on this earth and has included each and every one of us in that kingdom. In Christ there is no male or female; slave or free; Jew or Gentile; we are all equal in Christ.<sup>6</sup> We have been unified by Christ, and thus partnership begins by each of us holding a place at this table. The second table is the kitchen table. The kitchen table is that place where a wide variety of daily tasks take place. Coffee is served; lives are shared; neighbors are welcomed. This is the place where true relationships of getting to know one another take place. The third table is the Communion Table.<sup>7</sup> This is the table where we are welcomed by God, to receive His love and grace and the foretaste of that heavenly banquet that will one day come when Christ returns and that final partnership with God is achieved. These are powerful images, both for addressing the partnership we are to have with one another and the relationships that go along with it. Without investing ourselves in relationships with one another, little progress can occur. Like my old youth ministry professor used to say, “before they care how much you know, they have to know how much you care.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Brady, "Justice for the Poor in a Land of Plenty: A Place at the Table," *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006): 353-54, Brady describes Russell's three tables at some length.

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>7</sup> Russell refers to this as the "Welcome Table" which is what some African-American churches call their Communion Table.

<sup>8</sup> The Rev. Whis Hays, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry.

We are being called to care. We are being called to embrace the poor and the oppressed of our communities. And while we know that no program, civil or ecclesiastical, will ever completely eradicate the problem of poverty until Christ does in fact return,<sup>9</sup> we also know that we are stewards of God's creation. We are stewards of the kingdom that he has established here on earth; and by seeking justice and righteousness for the lowly and outcast of this kingdom, we become imitators of Christ. And more than just imitators, we become servants of the Most High God, who has become poor, and identified himself with the hungry, naked, thirsty, stranger and prisoner.<sup>10</sup>

Understanding the importance of relationships within this ministry in all areas helped us to discern and develop our common vision for the Fellowship Dinner Ministry. That vision was *"to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of our community by meeting both their spiritual needs, through transforming worship, and their physical need with the provision of a meal, extra food, and clothing."* This vision combined not only the original idea of adding a worship service, but also highlighted and enhanced the ministries of the Food Pantry and Clothes Closet, which also play an important role in this ministry. In addition active outreach and invitation to the community around us and the importance of developing relationships have become a part of this ministry's goals and mission. The diagram below was created and used to demonstrate the mission and vision of the ministry with its various components (Figure 7.1).

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<sup>9</sup> David T. Gordon, "A Biblical Theology of Poverty and Almsgiving" (lecture, The Road from Poverty to Freedom, Grove City College, Grove City, PA, April 4 & 5, 2005), [www.gcc.savvior.com/docs/Gordon\\_Poverty%20and%20Almsgiving.pdf](http://www.gcc.savvior.com/docs/Gordon_Poverty%20and%20Almsgiving.pdf). (Accessed July 17, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 25:31-46.



Figure 7.1. The Vision of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

One can see through this diagram that there are five core areas that we want to highlight and reflect in this ministry. While, there is no doubt that the dinner and worship service may play the most prominent visible roles, they are constantly being supported through establishing relationships and evangelism which build up the community and our congregation. Also, the Food Pantry, which previously had been designated to a side closet, could now be fully utilized because the prohibition against mixing “Food Bank” food with “Food Pantry” food was no longer an issue. This diagram helped flesh out the common vision the Lord was leading us into, gave us the confidence to embrace those measure risks, and provided the framework for the work elements of the leadership roles that were needed.

Before launching into the work elements of the leadership team roles, there is one more aspect of measured risk that must be discussed because of the prominence it played in our plan. We were hoping to have a considerable number of outside groups and churches partner and participate in this ministry with us. There were two key reasons for this. The first was a spiritual opportunity for a church or other organization to come and to serve without having to establish this sort of ministry themselves. For those participating, it would yield benefits similar to taking a short-term mission trip. The second reason was more practical for us. There was about to be a substantial increase in how much this ministry was going to cost. If we were able to gain several partners in this ministry, it would help our budget and the fear of not having enough money. There was already one church who was a consistent partner and our Scout troop who occasionally served as well. Our goal was to increase this number dramatically. This meant that we would have to have a person responsible for contacting and scheduling outside groups or churches, as well as training teams to be liaisons when they were scheduled. This was just one of the work elements and leadership roles that needed to be discussed and established.

One of the major problems, if not the biggest problem, of the Community Meal ministry was that one person was responsible for doing almost everything. This was not a mistake that could be repeated, therefore the leadership team began to list the various work elements that needed to be accomplished in order for the ministry to run smoothly. We began by brainstorming every component, every detail, no matter how small. We listed them on giant Post-It Notes, and covered the walls with them. The next step

involved combining elements that were similar, and placing them under broader headings. After finishing our list of elements—we established leadership positions based on the elements and the amount of responsibility that was going to be necessary. We established six leadership roles: Kitchen Coordinator, [Cooking] Team Coordinator, Food Pantry/Clothes Closet Coordinator, Worship Coordinator, Outside Group Coordinator, and Evangelism/Communications Coordinator. The elements were then clearly established into a chart that showed the roles and responsibilities (Table 7.1).

In developing these roles it was also important to identify what they were, as well as what they were not. Even though there were more leaders, the cooking teams were going to have to take more responsibility for this ministry than was currently occurring. Several work elements were eliminated from the list, because they were going to be the responsibility of the cooking teams. These included such things as kitchen shut-down, making sure the doors were locked, finding their own substitutes, and planning their own menu. Some of these elements that were presently happening I found incomprehensible. Not only was the coordinator fulfilling nearly every leadership duty, she was also in charge of locking up or finding your replacement!?! Having developed a common vision, taken on the measured risks, and established leadership roles now we were only lacking a specific plan to accomplish these goals.



Leadership Team Roles for the Fellowship Dinner

<u>Work Elements</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Outside</u>	<u>Kitchen</u>	<u>Worship</u>	<u>Pantry</u>	<u>Evangel/Comm</u>
<i>Recruit team leaders</i>	R	S	S	S	S	S
<i>Develop and implement ideas for outreach and publicity</i>	I	S	I	I		R
<i>Provide training for teams and members</i>	R	C	S	C	S	I
<i>Contact Churches and other organizations</i>		R				S
<i>Recruit Music Team for Worship</i>				R*		
<i>Develop Worship Service and Bulletin</i>				R*		
<i>Recruit Personnel for Worship Elements</i>	C	S		R		
<i>Organize Kitchen</i>	C		R		S	
<i>Schedule Outside Groups</i>	I	R	I	S	I	I
<i>Schedule Parish Teams</i>	R	I	I	I	I	I
<i>Create Sample Menus</i>	I		R		S	
<i>Develop and Publish Expectations for Ministry</i>	R	C	C	C	C	C
<i>Develop and Publish guidelines for Teams</i>	S	S	R	I	C	I
<i>Develop Budget</i>	C	C	R	C	C	C
<i>Keep Stop-Gap Food Stocked</i>	C		R		S	
<i>Develop Database of Parish volunteers</i>	R	C	C	C	C	C
<i>Keep Parish Informed of Ministry Progress</i>	S	S				R
<i>Recruit and Train Volunteers for Clothes Closet</i>	I				R	I
<i>Develop and Implement Distribution Guidelines for Food Pantry</i>	I		I		R	

R=person responsible

C=person consulted

S=person to lend support

I=person informed

\* =Rector involvement

Table 7.1. Leadership Team Roles for the Fellowship Dinner.

The final aspect of the foundational stage was developing a specific plan through which to carry out the vision and mission of this ministry. This was a vital step to ensure proper implementation; likewise, it was a step that must follow the vision having been perceived. The specific plan the team had was made up of several SMART goals that needed to be achieved in order for the congregation to come to a positive understanding of the vision of this ministry and to prepare them for a smooth transition. SMART goals mean goals that are: specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and time-specific.<sup>11</sup> A sampling of some of the primary goals that the leadership team developed were:

1. Create and present a presentation of the vision and mission of this ministry to the congregation by mid-September.
2. Have eight cooking teams making a commitment to this ministry by the end of September.
3. Develop a log sheet to track dinners, helpers, menu, which can be used to develop and maintain database by September 23<sup>rd</sup>.
4. Develop and distribute evangelism materials by end of September.
5. Create a flyer to send to contacted churches and other organizations by beginning of October.
6. Develop and train teams by mid-October.
7. Create a yearly schedule by end of October.<sup>12</sup>

In developing this plan and working hard to complete the various elements represented in the plan concluded the foundational stage and transitioned us into the implementation stage, where we would bring the entire congregation into the conversation concerning the direction and vision of this ministry.

The first step of implementation, or perhaps a transitional step between the foundation and implementation stage, was to present the vision, plans, and foundation of the Fellowship Dinner ministry at an informational meeting to the parish. If there was

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Hays, ""Pastoral Leadership"" (lecture, Pastoral Leadership, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA, January 1996).

<sup>12</sup> A selection of the resources developed can be found in Appendix 1- 6.

interest and enthusiasm to proceed then we could move toward implementation. This meeting was met with great success, and while we lost a few members from a couple of current cooking teams, a strong majority committed to the changes. Additionally, there were many people who were not presently involved, who were willing to commit to the new format. Overall it appeared there would be significantly more involvement than we had ever had, and enough interest to proceed. The transition date was set for September 25<sup>th</sup>, only a few weeks away, and implementation was set to begin.

Implementation meant basically carrying out the SMART goals that were established, as well as continuing support, consultation and training for the teams and their members. This is where the leadership team both in theory and in practice truly excelled. There is no way that one person or even a couple could have performed all that needed to be done. The team coordinator did a fabulous job recruiting, organizing, and training the cooking teams. The kitchen coordinator was able to focus and concentrate on organization and stocking the staples, as well provide advice and some sample menus and ideas for new teams. Because we were no longer purchasing food from the food bank there was no need to separate the food pantry items from the food bank items, and so all of the food was organized and stored in a common place by the pantry coordinator. The evangelism/ communications coordinator began implementing ways to keep the parish informed and connected and preparing for outreach events distributing door hangers. Outside groups began to be contacted and informational brochures created to recruit other cooking teams by the outside coordinator. The leadership team worked diligently, also

with the slight flexibility that everything did not have to be perfected before the switch, but there would be minor tweaking along the way.

There were two major aspects that needed to be developed before the transition. The first was the recruiting and training of the cooking teams. With the addition of many brand new teams, it was important to train them on the general way this ministry took place. Of course, even for the experienced teams, there would be a learning curve as new options such as baking desserts at home, or recruiting outside help was now available to them. One of the wisest courses of action was to schedule those teams who had been currently part of this ministry to cook first, so as not to increase the pressure upon the cooking teams, or the leadership team. This would, hopefully, enable us to work out any minor kinks as well.

The second aspect was that of worship. Perhaps the most difficult part of this entire project was in telling the Saturday night congregation that we would be transitioning to a new Sunday worship format and ceasing to service on Saturday nights. Thankfully, most received this news well, but from others I heard about it for a long time.<sup>13</sup> This aspect also dealt with the design and development of the service itself, which was meant to primarily meet the needs of those in the community, but also to be sensitive to those presently attending the Saturday service. This meant dealing with issues such as holding the service in the church, having communion, using traditional prayers, and music. After much prayer we developed a series of services that met in the church,

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<sup>13</sup> Norma Knott, may she rest in peace, graciously, but boldly expressed her disapproval of this decision until she went to her eternal reward.

included traditional and contemporary music, where communion was received, the Word of God was proclaimed, and a time for laying on of hands and anointing took place.<sup>14</sup> With the worship design and the cooking team training complete the only aspect of implementation left was to pray and trust God.

The transition for this ministry was implemented on Sunday, September 25, 2005. The coming months would see a renewed excitement within the parish, a hard-working leadership team, a rise in worship attendance, and a dramatic increase in the number of meals that were being served. One of the greatest highlights of those first months was a visit from the Bishop, who attended the worship service and dinner to provide support and encouragement. After anointing a congregation of over fifty, and being anointed himself, he stated repeatedly what a blessing it had been to be a part of this service and ministry. He could see the hand of God powerfully at work. Most everyone appeared to be blessed by what had taken place in this prayerful transition. It seemed that the decision to undertake this measured risk and enter into this new vision was God-ordained. But, many new ministries start with this type of fervor and excitement, and like the Community Meal ministry before, the flame can soon die out. How will the Fellowship Dinner Ministry continue to live into this vision after a year? Two years? Five Years?

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<sup>14</sup> A sampling of these bulletins can be found in Appendix 7.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT

When I spoke recently to one of the original leadership team members and asked her to describe the Fellowship Dinner today, she replied, “if the meal would have disappeared six years ago, I am not sure that many in the parish would have missed it—but now everyone would. I cannot imagine it not being here.” This is the sentiment held by many in our congregation today, and is what makes the evaluation of this ministry unique. Over the past six years there have been several adjustments made in the ministry—some major, some minor—but the fire for this ministry burns as brightly as ever. Perhaps, equally important is the transformative effect that it began to have on the Church of the Messiah as a whole. In a recent survey, nearly everyone who responded declared that the Fellowship Dinner Ministry was important (or very important) to the vision and spiritual health of the Church of the Messiah (Figure 8.1). The Fellowship Dinner Ministry has become one of the core elements of our identity, of who we are in the community and who we are as people of God. How did this happen? What was it that transpired over these past six years to create such a dramatic shift in the life of this congregation? I do not think that it can be pinpointed to any one thing. Nor do I believe that it happened overnight. Rather it was a gradual transformation that occurred through faithful obedience, compassion, worship, and love for one another and our neighbor.

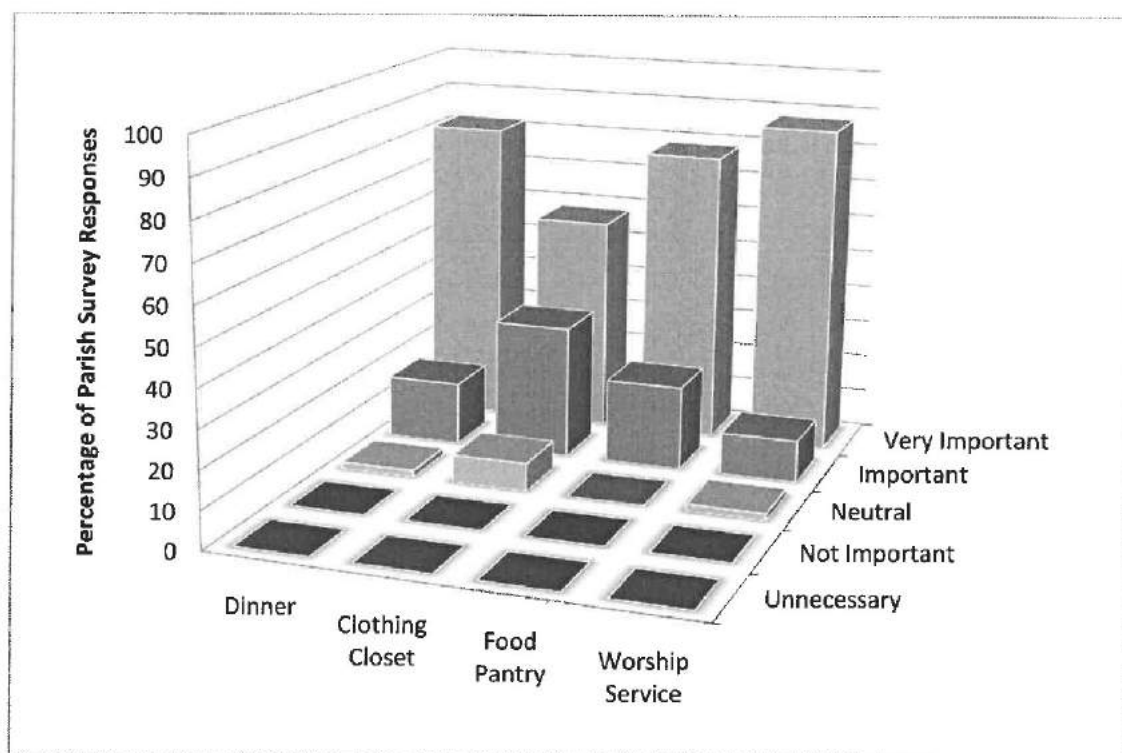


Figure 8.1. Importance of Fellowship Dinner to the Vision and Spiritual Health of Messiah.

Throughout the remaining chapters I will attempt to portray the transformation and shift which has taken place by using the components previously described which make up the Fellowship Dinner Ministry: dinner, pantry, worship, relationships, and evangelism. In this chapter I will focus on the dinner and pantry. In chapter nine, I will focus on the worship service. In chapter ten, I will examine the components of relationships and evangelism. The first observation that must be made is to remind the reader of the vision for the Fellowship Dinner that was presented to the congregation (Figure 8.2). This figure helped visually articulate the vision: “to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of our community by meeting both their spiritual needs, through transforming worship, and their physical need with the provision of a meal, extra food, and clothing.”

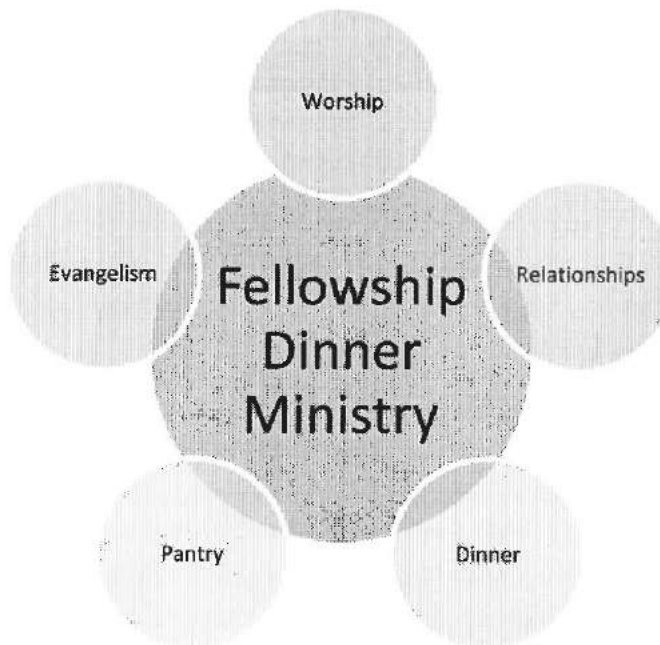


Figure 8.2. The Vision of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

It clearly showed that the focus was not only a meal being served, but a variety of other aspects as well, including a food pantry and a worship service. It demonstrated that we were branching out into a broader mission of serving our community spiritually and relationally, as well as physically. While this diagram was certainly helpful in demonstrating these new realities, over time an amazing thing began happening. This ministry began to operate with a common vision that was made up of different components, but that was lived out dependent upon one another. The ministry started taking a shape that resembled a multi-component Venn diagram (Figure 8.3).



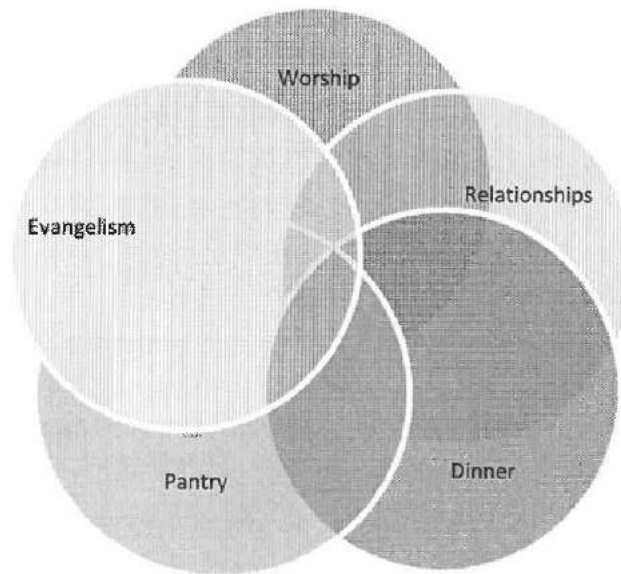


Figure 8.3. Interdependence of the Elements of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry.

In this figure we observe that the components are not independent within the vision alone, but overlap and are often inter-dependent on one another. Relationships, for instance, touch every aspect of this ministry. Therefore, there will also be some overlap within my own observations as I report on the transformation of these areas.

### **The Dinner**

The first area that I want to investigate is that of the dinner itself. This is appropriate since it is after all the dinner that provides physical nourishment and relief, most closely resembles the original mission, and is central to having a Fellowship *Dinner* Ministry. At the same time it is interesting to note that it is the dinners themselves, as well as the teams that serve them that have undergone the least amount of transition from

the first few months, at least at first glance. The number of dinners served has not changed dramatically since the shift from lunch to dinner, still hovering around a twenty percent increase (Figure 8.4).<sup>1</sup> The biggest observation concerning the number of dinners served is that the attendance increases throughout the month. At the beginning of the month people still have food stamps, social security money and other government assistance. But by the end of the month they are struggling. In months when there are five Sundays, there is a tremendous spike in the number of people who attend on that fifth Sunday of the month. While there are other indicators that will create a shift in the number of dinners served: the economy, the weather, the closing of the local hotel, the relocation of the Open Door Soup Kitchen, none are as reliable as what week of the month it is.

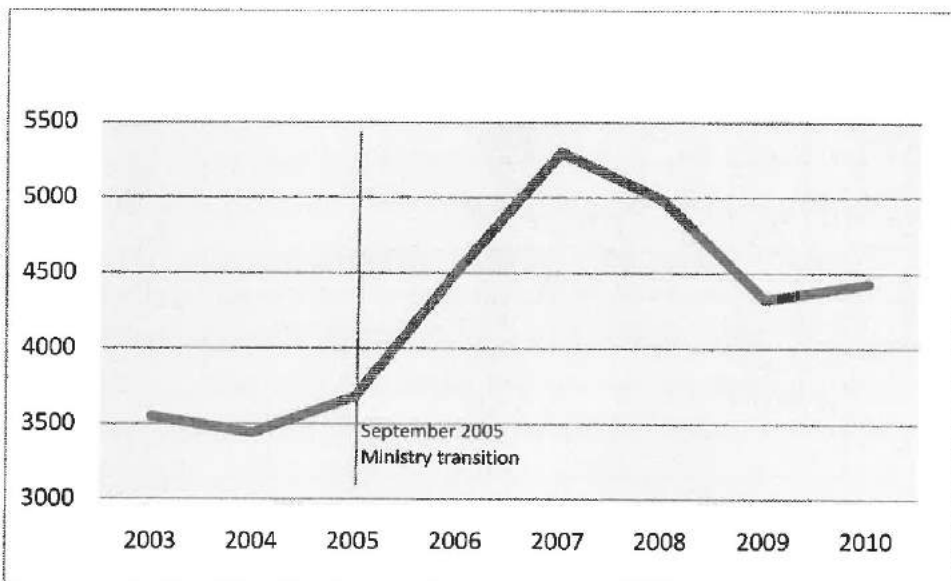


Figure 8.4. Number of Meals Served Per Year.

<sup>1</sup> Although there was a spike in 2007, the number of meals served are generally about 1000 more per year since the transition to serving an evening Fellowship Dinner meal.

The teams also have had little fluctuation. With the sole exception of the team from St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Lake Luzerne, who withdrew after two years of service, in order to start their own meal ministry on Saturday afternoons, every team still is serving today.<sup>2</sup> There have been some leadership transitions and several team membership changes. But these happen occasionally, and without disrupting the schedule or flow of the rotation. Of the four new team leaders that have emerged, each of them was raised from within the team itself. And it is important to note that those team leaders have each withdrawn after serving more than a decade in this ministry.<sup>3</sup> What I was not prepared for was the transition of the teams themselves becoming several leadership teams within this ministry.

We were right about the importance and value of having a committed leadership team to be in place to provide community and continuity over time. We were wrong about who that team would be. The leadership team that gathered that first summer did an incredible job of praying together; and of brainstorming and planning the logistics of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry; of creating roles and taking responsibility; and finally of implementing everything that fall. They trained the teams, stocked the kitchen, organized the Food Pantry, and distributed flyers to the community. But, in the end that group more closely resembled Nehemiah and the re-building of the walls of Jerusalem. It became harder and harder to get the group to come together regularly. A big reason for this was

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<sup>2</sup> This gap has been made up with seasonal parishioners who form a summer team and outside groups.

<sup>3</sup> Dating back to the Community Meal noontime meals.

the sense that there was no need because things were running so smoothly. In actuality, there was something bigger at work.

The teams themselves have become the leadership teams. Each of the members of the leadership team was part of a Fellowship Dinner cooking team. Because so much preparation and planning was done in the initial stage, most of the tweaking and evaluation could be done within their team or at the meetings where everyone gathered for debriefing. Even more importantly the teams took on those characteristics of being trusted communities. Within each team community and consistency emerged. The roles became clear. The camaraderie deepened. Again and again when I ask teams what they like best about this ministry, they reply “they love coming together; they have fun with one another.” This does not mean they do not like cooking and serving the poor in the community. They see the importance of this ministry. But they love to be with each other, and they look forward to the next time.<sup>4</sup>

All of the roles that were so vital for having the dinners flow smoothly have been taken over by the teams themselves. In fact, another of the regular comments by those who serve on the teams is, “this is easy.” Many of these teams have similar roles within their teams.<sup>5</sup> On one team the person’s job is always to bring the milk, on another it is to run the dishwasher, on another it is to make the sloppy-joes, on another it is simply to roll the silverware for the dinner. The concern of having food on hand in case a team did not

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<sup>4</sup> One team so much so that when an outside group relieves them of their scheduled duties, they see this as “being bumped.”

<sup>5</sup> Whether these are spoken or unspoken, they exist.

show up as scheduled has faded away, because it has never happened.<sup>6</sup> Each cooking team has become a leadership team, and it is this evolution that has contributed to the long success of this ministry. I am uncertain if one leadership team would be able to handle all of the issues and details that go into this ministry. We have eight leadership teams responsible for the dinners, and also for one another.<sup>7</sup> I have seen much pastoral support and celebration within each of these teams. They are truly remarkable.

One of our primary goals for this ministry was to have a large number of outside groups serving the dinners, perhaps serving as often as half of the time. The reason for this was both missional and financial. When I had served a previous church in Pittsburgh, I clearly recalled the blessings that our church team received when we participated in a similar ministry of feeding and serving.<sup>8</sup> I was thankful to have a ministry and place where I could bring a team to come and serve, and I wanted to be able to offer the same opportunity to churches and organizations in our community. That was the missional aspect. The financial reason was simpler. We were planning to reimburse the costs of our own teams, but not those of the outside groups. The church was already going to be making a larger investment in this ministry and any ways to cut costs would be welcomed.

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<sup>6</sup> One interesting observation is that the number of meals is generally double those who attend the worship service, so there have been instances where teams saw the church service full and threw on a pot of spaghetti in order to ensure that enough food would be available. Likewise, they are able to estimate the portion size based on this fact.

<sup>7</sup> This demonstrates how thin we were stretched when we had one individual largely responsible for everything.

<sup>8</sup> Shepherd's Heart in Oakland, PA.

Looking back, I do not think I fully appreciated the fear that many held concerning the congregation and vestry being unwilling to buy into the vision and invest in this ministry. Partly, this is because I had been serving for only a year and a half when this process began, and I was not fully aware of the history of financial battles that had taken place. However, this makes what occurred all the more amazing, because the parish and vestry have invested generously into this ministry. The budget for this ministry has more than doubled over these past six years, and excitement and energy, rather than woe and hand-wringing dominates. The result of this has been that it is primarily the missional aspect of this goal that continues, because the financial urgency is non-existent.

It should not be too surprising then that rather than the outside groups making up half of the Sunday dinners, they provide twenty to twenty-five percent of the meals each year.<sup>9</sup> Also, because this is presented as a mission opportunity the outside groups that come are outstanding. What is lacking in quantity is more than made up for in quality. The Confirmation classes of the local Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches both come every year. The Boy Scout Troop is actively involved every quarter. We have had families who all live on the same block join forces to come and serve. Last year Goldman Sachs began coming twice during the summer as part of their community service projects. They decorated the hall from top to bottom always with a theme. The first year was surrounding the Fourth of July and the last time they came it was a Hawaiian theme, where everyone received leis as they walked through the doors. The dinners made such an impact on the team members from Goldman Sachs, that several of them decided to come back this fall on their own to serve again. So while there may not be as many

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<sup>9</sup> We have anywhere from ten to fifteen outside groups each year.

outside groups as we originally envisioned, the Lord is certainly blessing us with the ones who come, and with the teams that we have. Perhaps, more importantly is that this provides a nice balance, which has allowed our cooking teams to strengthen in stability and community as they gather more regularly. This likely has allowed them to evolve into the leadership teams they have become.

One final comment concerning the dinners is the sincere appreciation those who attend the dinners demonstrate. They are thankful and polite, and while much of this will be addressed when I address the category of relationships, it must be mentioned here as well. Because of the consistency and longevity of these teams, there is a familiarity that begins to take place. After awhile the teams stop serving dinner, and they begin to serve people. They know one another's names; they talk to each other; they eat with together; they even joke around sometimes.<sup>10</sup> What this signifies is that there is something profound that is taking place. Relationships are vital to the success and sustainability of a ministry such as this one.

### **Food Pantry/ Clothing Closet**

The changes that have taken within the Clothing Closet and Food Pantry components are polar opposites. The Clothing Closet has not changed much from the transition from lunch to dinner. In the corner of Schuyler Hall there is a small room full

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<sup>10</sup> My favorite example of this is one team always makes Sloppy Joes for dinner. When someone asked what was for dinner, one person replied, "Sloppy Joes, it's all Mary Ann knows how to make." This got a big laugh from everyone, including Mary Ann (who can make other things, like baked brie; (that may be it though.))

of clothing, donated primarily by our congregation, which is available for people to browse and take with them. During the meal, those from the community search through the closet to see if there is anything that they need. They are allowed to take these items for free. A dedicated, largely unnoticed, team leads the organization of this ministry. They sort, fold, and hang donated clothes. They separate them into seasons, putting them out appropriately. Week after week the closet is filled and restocked with clothes. The biggest change to this ministry is not its appearance, but the quantity of clothing that is distributed to the community. There donations of clothing has more than doubled since making this transition, and the clothes do not stay on the shelves long. Occasionally, we receive requests for kids clothing or winter coats. Within a week or two after announcing to the congregation concerning the need, these items will be received and distributed. This has proven to be an important component for meeting the physical needs of the community.

On the other hand the Food Pantry has undergone a dramatic shift, looking next to nothing like it did before the transition was made. Prior to the transition the food from the Food Bank had to be separated from the food in the Pantry. This resulted, first, in the food being stored on a shelf in the supply room off of the secretary's office; and later, in a very small closet that now holds paper supplies. This meant that there was not much food in the food pantry, which led to very strict guidelines for how that small amount of food was distributed. A person could only receive food once every month. Their name had to be written down and recorded. Even then, one would have to be fully aware of this



process, and go seek out the person in charge of the food pantry, because the pantry was in a separate area from the meal being served. This was not an optimal setup.

There were a couple immediate developments that pushed this component in another direction. The first that we were fortunate to have one of the youth in our parish in need of an Eagle Scout project, which turned into him multiplying the amount of shelving space that was available for the food as he reorganized the pantry room. Having all this room led to our Food Pantry leadership team to fill the shelves by organizing what we had into appropriate categories, e.g. fruits and vegetables, and then requesting from the congregation those things that were lacking.<sup>11</sup> This led to the final step of giving a bag of food filled with a few items to anyone who wanted one, regardless of whether they had been there the previous week or not. As one could imagine, this greatly increased the number of people utilizing this ministry component.

Much like the clothing closet, we are dependent upon donations from the parish to keep the shelves stocked; and also like the closet the food does not stay on the shelves long.<sup>12</sup> This leads me to two other observations concerning this ministry. The first is in the overwhelming generosity of The Church of the Messiah. The Food Pantry distributes on average twenty-five bags of food each week.<sup>13</sup> In every bag the people are allowed to choose five items that they would like to have.<sup>14</sup> This means that weekly we distribute between 125 items to those who attend the dinners. This works out to giving away over

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<sup>11</sup> They still do an incredible job.

<sup>12</sup> Especially, the staples of Chef Boyardee, Spam, tuna, peanut butter, and cereal.

<sup>13</sup> The most was over forty.

<sup>14</sup> This number fluctuates between five and six based on the amount of food in the pantry and number of people utilizing the ministry.

6500 items every year. A substantial percentage of that comes from our parish family.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, from those who responded to a survey nearly sixty percent donate at least monthly to the Food Pantry (Figure 8.5.)

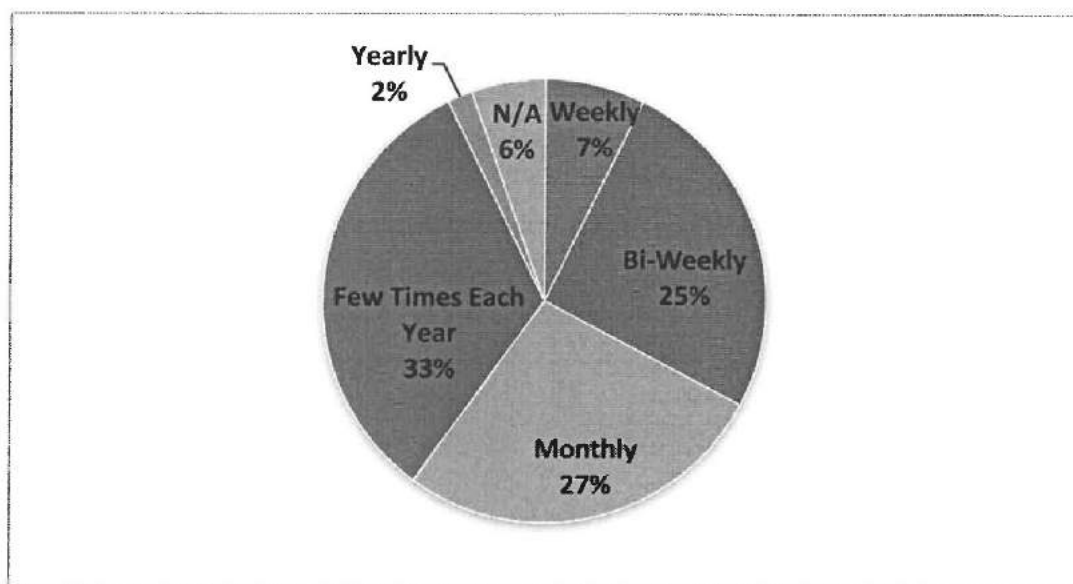


Figure 8.5. Frequency of Donations to the Food Pantry.

The second observation is directly related, which is that there has been a dramatic increase of people utilizing the Food Pantry in the past few years.<sup>16</sup> Whether this is due to diligence on our parts, the economy, the generous giving, or a combination of each I am uncertain; however, the increase in the use of the Food Pantry has been exponential

<sup>15</sup> We are also the recipients of a few food drives from Weight Watchers and the Scouts.

<sup>16</sup> I am not sure of the exact date shift, but a couple of years ago the number of bags we were handing out increased so dramatically that we began keeping track of how much was distributed. Therefore, we only have figures specific to the past three years or so.

following the transition.<sup>17</sup> As we depart this chapter which focused upon our physical nourishment, we fix our eyes upon the spiritual aspect of worship in the next.

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<sup>17</sup> One final observation concerning the Food Pantry ministry also concerns the relational aspect. I am often one of the people in the pantry distributing the food to those in line. This has been a great place to get to know them a little bit. What is their name? Is this their first time here? Do they have something to cook on or possess a can opener?

## CHAPTER NINE

### MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE

#### **Worship**

If the clothing closet underwent the least amount of change in the transition to the Fellowship Dinner Ministry; and the food pantry had the greatest amount of change; the worship service has had the most adjustments since making the transition, including a major adjustment of service location. The worship service was created to help meet the spiritual needs of the people, in addition to trying to meet their physical needs through the dinner, clothing closet and food pantry. The service meets an hour before the dinner and had three major goals as we looked to transition to the Fellowship Dinner Ministry:

- To meet the needs of the community, while being pastorally sensitive to those attending the current Saturday evening service.
- To develop a liturgy that draws upon our Anglican traditions while also focusing on the community we are serving.
- To allow people to actively participate in worship and experience God's transforming love and power.

The evaluation of these goals will be the primary focus of this chapter.

In addressing this first goal, one of the biggest decisions that we made was to hold the worship service in the church. While the leadership team discussed holding the service in Schuyler Hall in the Parish House, the room where the dinner was served, we generally felt that there were enough major changes taking place. We were already

moving the day and format of the service, should we really move the location, as well? There were advantages and disadvantages to this decision. One advantage was that this was a pastoral response to those attending the Saturday service. While many of them began attending the Sunday early morning service, there were a handful of faithful, older parishioners who continued to favor the evenings, and they desired to worship in the church building. They also were gracious in welcoming those who attended the dinners and included them fully in the worship service. This was another advantage, and frankly a blessing that surpassed expectations. While we will discuss the specific liturgy design later in this chapter, the dramatic shift that took place in the liturgy cannot be overstated. We added music where there was none; and we subtracted traditional prayers where there were many. Yet they embraced the people who came to worship within the context of this new format; and it was wonderful to have such a mixed cadre of people attending the worship service. While St. Paul writes that we are all one in Christ,<sup>1</sup> the sad truth is that churches are often homogeneous.

However, there were two distinct disadvantages. The first was that it was nearly impossible for the cooking teams to take part in the service since the Parish House and church are across the street from one another. Occasionally, an outside church would come with a huge mission group and some would cook and some would attend the service, but this was rare. Even though much of the actual cooking was completed by the time of the dinners, there is plenty of preparation that needs to take place. The second disadvantage was the unfortunate reality that the church building is an intimidating structure to many people. The leadership team did not understand the extent to which this was true in the lives of many in our community. They would enter the Parish House and

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13.

attend the meals, but the church building was a different story. No amount of coaxing and prodding could get some of them to come inside, and experience for themselves that the God would not strike them down or that it was a place they were welcome. In the end, it was this reality that would lead us into undergoing a major change in the summer of 2008.

While we were still meeting our other two goals of focused liturgy and worship experience, even with the service being held in the church, we prayerfully made the decision to move the service into Schuyler Hall. This came about primarily because of this disadvantages previously addressed, and also because the service attendance was declining. There were a couple of reasons for the decline. The first was that several of the people, who initially attended, no longer did. Some came to another service; some were homebound due to health; a couple had died. The second reason is that while the excitement for serving at the dinner was still burning hot, that same initial excitement had waned in the worship service. This is not to say that God was not blessing those in worship, but there were several people who had committed to attending this service in addition to a morning service, yet were attending less frequently. These realities combined with the fact that we were not able to fully reach the people we were seeking to serve, since they refused to enter the church, led us to launching a trial seven-week run to determine if moving the service was the right decision to make. The attendance did increase slightly during this seven-week period, but more importantly the worship team sensed that this was the direction that God was now leading us to make. This was as important as anything that occurred during the initial transition. As we continued to listen

and seek God, He continued to guide and direct us. This did not make the initial decision to hold the service in the church wrong; it absolutely was the right decision to make at the time. However, it would have been a mistake to think that God had spoken once and for all about what this service would look like. In truth we discovered that one season had ended, and a new season was about to emerge.

Before addressing the other two goals of liturgy development and experiencing God in worship that were put forth, I want to briefly highlight the attendance changes that took place after moving the service to Schuyler Hall. It is often said that attendance figures do not mean everything, and while this is certainly true, they provide a decent barometer by which to evaluate. It would be inaccurate to say that there was an immediate jump in numbers after moving the service, but gradually more and more people began to attend (Figure 9.1.) In reality, even the Average Attendance figures are misleading. For one, it was not until mid-March of 2009 when the attendance began to pick up and develop some consistency; and for another, this service was now primarily made up of people from the community, as the remaining parishioners, who had attended the service began to attend the morning services, which were held in the church. Much of this growth could be attributed to removing the barrier of the church building itself, but the relational preparation and the format the service would take on were equally important.

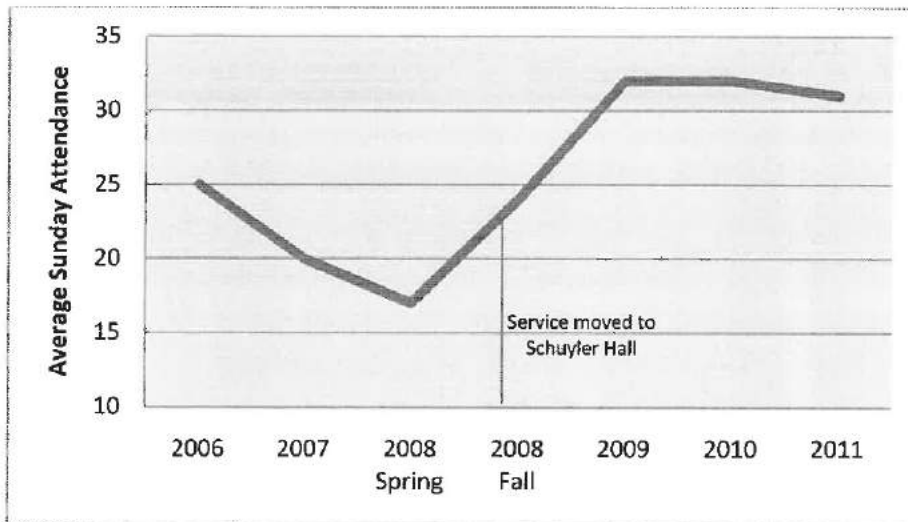


Figure 9.1. Average Sunday Attendance at Worship Service.

The seven-week trial of holding the service in Schuyler Hall occurred during the last two weeks of May and all of June in 2008. The service did not explode with people attending, but many who would not attend in the church began to come. One of the highlights of this service was the time of prayer and anointing, as nearly half of the congregation would come forward after communion to receive anointing with oil and prayer. The decision to have only a seven-week trial was pre-determined by the worship team. Regardless of our perceived success of the service, we would take the rest of the summer off to evaluate and plan the format of the service beginning that fall. As the seven weeks came to an end, I felt the Lord affirming this decision, but also an encouragement to continue that time of prayer and anointing. Each week I attended the dinners; I spoke to everyone throughout the meal; I prayed for all who wanted prayer; and I anointed all who desired it. This provided an excellent opportunity to develop deeper relationships, as the intimate needs and desires surfaced in the lives of the people



of the community. This period of strengthening relationships with the community provided a foundation for developing the worship service that would emerge that fall.<sup>2</sup>

The development of a liturgy that drew upon the tradition of Anglicanism and was relevant and accessible to the community was the second goal that the leadership team established for the worship service. Primarily, this meant that we would utilize the rich heritage of prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, biblical and evangelistic preaching, powerful music, healing and anointing, and Holy Communion. When the service was held in the church, the structure was more formal. There were a series of bulletins, that when taken together would provide the entire Eucharistic liturgy over the course of the month. This created an abbreviated service, where the focus was on the active participation of congregational prayers, singing, receiving communion, and the laying on of hands.<sup>3</sup> As the worship team planned for the liturgy in Schuyler Hall we decided to make our own worship booklets to be handed out. These spiral-bound booklets would contain several corporate prayers and canticles at the front of the book, followed by fifty songs that were both contemporary and traditional. Because of the limited numbers, in contrast to the hymnal and Prayer Book, we could grow comfortable with the music and prayers together. The service itself was not too different in form from the one celebrated in the church, but the character that it took on was dramatically different.

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<sup>2</sup> It cannot be stressed strongly enough, that it took two and a half years of holding services in the church, a summer of intense relationship building, and another six full months of holding worship services in Schuyler Hall before there was a real sense of trust and community taking place in the worship services. I believe that period would have been even longer without investment that occurred that summer.

<sup>3</sup> A sampling of these bulletins can be found in Appendix 7. Interestingly enough, as the Episcopal Church has migrated to a weekly celebration of the Eucharist, there has been an absence of much of the prayers in the Daily Office that were utilized during these services. This means that many who attended these services were being exposed to more of the Book of Common Prayer than those attended worship each Sunday morning.

Recently, one of my parishioners had been out of town in the morning and decided to attend the Sunday evening worship service. When the service was over, he spoke to me and said, “Father, this is a wonderful thing that you are doing here—you will never see me at this service again.” On the surface that statement looks like he was being insulting. In fact, I took it to be one of the greatest compliments I have received yet. The comments of this parishioner affirmed that we were doing what we had set out to do. We were reaching out to the people of our community through this worship service. Moreover, he was articulating one the main vision components of this ministry: we were creating an environment where people felt comfortable to worship, experience, and receive the proclamation of Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only was he articulating this point, but he was endorsing it, while acknowledging that it created an issue of sacrifice for the traditional Episcopalian.

The service has a coffee house feel to it. Perhaps, that is because people are constantly getting up to get coffee throughout the service. It is extremely relaxed. We are gathered around the same round tables where they eat dinner. I sit at the front of the room on a stool. The service begins by several songs being sung out of the book. These are generally chosen by the congregation. They call out numbers: “thirty-four; sixteen; eight; four.”<sup>4</sup> We sing these songs and then choose one of the corporate prayers or canticles to

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<sup>4</sup> Always four...this is Chris Tomlin et al., “Amazing Grace (my Chains Are Gone),” *Worshiptogether.com*, 2006. I used to love this song, now I would be happy never to sing it again. (But of course, I do sing it—every week.)

pray together.<sup>5</sup> This is followed by a reading of scripture, often read by one of the community members in the congregation. This leads into the sermon, and more singing; followed by the Peace and Communion, and still more singing. During this final block of singing, the songs of which the congregation is still choosing through calling out numbers, a prayer team moves from table to table, person to person, offering to pray for them.<sup>6</sup> When all have received prayer I give the final blessing and announce that dinner will be served shortly. It is a unique service. It is a holy service. But it is definitely a service targeted to our community, as opposed to life-long Episcopalians.

There are many ways that this service is specifically targeted to our community: the relaxed atmosphere,<sup>7</sup> the way the music is chosen through their selection, and through the proclamation of God's Holy Word. The sermon is specifically crafted to be conversational and engaging to the congregation, often inviting their participation. The readings are chosen out of a two-year lectionary cycle, which I crafted, that contain 104 essential Bible passages.<sup>8</sup> These passages are primarily stories and parables that can be unpacked with cultural details or background that sets the scene and context for the event taking place. For instance, one Sunday, the sermon was on the passage about Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers. I had members of the congregation come up and

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<sup>5</sup> An example is the *Phos hilaron*: O gracious light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

<sup>6</sup> Because the dinner is held in the same room, as the time for dinner comes closer more and more people arrive later in the service. We stop counting the attendance at the "Peace," so usually times by the time the prayer team is moving through the room there are twenty to fifty percent more in attendance receiving prayer.

<sup>7</sup> A few would say a bit too relaxed; (you know who you are).

<sup>8</sup> I got this idea from Whitney T. Kuniholm, *The Essential Bible Guide: 100 Readings through the World's Most Important Book* (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2003), but altered it to fit my own environment. A copy of this lectionary can be found in Appendix 8.

act out the various characters of the story. Each of Jacob's wives and concubines was portrayed with the various children. We had seventeen members of the congregation in front of the room acting out their parts and participating in this message. Witnessing the passage this way demonstrated both why Joseph might be Jacob's favorite and also why the other brothers envied him because of it. This has been one of the most meaningful aspects of this service for me personally. It has been a blessing to find ways to bring God's love and grace to life. One of the themes, which is repeated through these weekly sermons, is the love of God is for *you*. Often it is preached that Jesus died for the sins of the world; it is proclaimed that God loves everyone. This is true. But Jesus did not just die for the world; God does not just love everyone; He died for *you*; He loves *you*. This is a powerful message for anyone to hear,<sup>9</sup> but especially for those who have been marginalized by our society. This is the message of hope; the message of transformation.

Experiencing this transforming power of Jesus Christ was the final goal that the leadership team created for the worship service. It is impossible to fully evaluate this goal without infringing upon the evaluation of the next Fellowship Dinner Ministry component: relationships. Ultimately, the experience of God's transforming love and power leads to relationships. It leads to a relationship with God in Jesus Christ; and it leads to a relationship with one another in the Church. Therefore, while recognizing that this reality generally happens in tandem, I will focus on the relationship with God in for the purposes of evaluating the worship service.

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<sup>9</sup> Including, you.

There has been a tremendous amount of spiritual growth that has taken place in the lives of His people throughout the past several years. For the past three years on Easter day, there have been members who have confessed the faith Jesus and have been baptized into the body of Christ. We have had five baptisms over the past three years. One of the young ladies, K., who was baptized, no longer attends our service. With God's grace she has gotten a job, an apartment, and has straightened out her life. This presents one of the challenging realities of serving this congregation. In a "normal" church, when people grow in their faith they become a stronger part of the fabric of the church. Here, if their lives are powerfully transformed, they can heal and are able to move on with their lives. While this would be best for us if they were able to transition to one of the morning services, often times true healing can only take place if they leave behind everything, but God: the drugs, the alcohol, the people they associated with, and the city itself.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the people have begun breaking through that barrier of entering the church building and started attending morning services in the church from time to time; others come to special services, like Christmas Eve, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and Easter morning. One of the members of our community, L., who usually reads the lesson at the service, was confirmed by the Bishop a couple of years ago. He attended all of the classes with our Sunday morning parishioners, and they were all confirmed together. This was a powerful experience for him, for the Bishop, and for our entire parish family. The Bishop praised the parish not only for reaching out with God's love into the community, but also commented on the love of God that he sensed at work within the parish itself.

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<sup>10</sup> I see K. working at the local grocery store often and she tells me that she is doing quite well.

It is a great privilege to serve as a pastor, and be a vessel of God's grace and love to the people whom I minister, and this is no exception. In addition to the baptisms and confirmation, we have also presided over a wedding and a funeral. Both of these were meaningful events; and probably the greatest indicator that people are experiencing God in worship. The people are beginning to see this as their church; and us as their pastors.<sup>11</sup> I have had countless pastoral conversations and prayers with people, either after the service, during the meal, or throughout the week as I encounter them around the city or as they come to visit me in my office.

J., was a young man who had been coming to the dinner for a few months. One Sunday evening last December, he joined a group made up of the members of all of our services to go Christmas caroling around the neighborhood. He could not wait to show us his house as we caroled. His excitement was overwhelming as we finally reached his house and sang out "Joy to the World." J. was an active part of the service since that day, and when his mother was admitted into the Intensive Care Unit of our local hospital, his family all stopped by my office. They asked if I would go and visit and pray with her, which I did with great honor. The Lord healed her, and she returned home to her family. I cannot say if a major spiritual transformation occurred within that family. The mother has attended only one worship service, and she occasionally attends the dinner, but it has impacted her children; and it has impacted me.

We are being called upon with increasing frequency by the members of the service to come and visit them and their families in the hospital. If they are going in for

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<sup>11</sup> This also includes Deacon Nancy Goff and those on the Prayer Teams.

procedures, we go and visit them. There are even a couple of instances The Church of the Messiah is listed as their official church in the hospital database. Recently, I was called by the hospital to go and visit a couple, M. and D., who had told the staff that we were their church. D. was in the Intensive Care Unit following severe complications caused by her recent pregnancy and childbirth. While she recovered in the hospital, Social Services had taken custody of the baby. M. and D. were in obvious distress and over the next weeks there was much prayer and counsel that took place with the two of them. First and foremost, to get D. well and released from the hospital, then secondly to bring the couple to the emotional place where they were able to regain custody of their little girl. Blessedly both of these took place, and I had the fortune to go their apartment and say a blessing upon their beautiful daughter.

We are also fortunate that our Deacon, the Rev. Nancy Goff, is one of the hospital chaplains and is able to call and visit the members of our community, even when we are not informed of their admittance. Each of these instances has helped create levels of spiritual trust. We pray for God's healing to bless them and their families as they lie in sickness. We sit with them; talk with them; and ask God to bring them to fullness of health: in body, mind, and spirit. We care for them; and in this care many have come to experience the transforming power of God's love and grace in their lives.

This is worship.

We are bringing people into a relationship with the living God. It is not something that takes place only within the context of a service, because when we experience the grace of God it transforms our whole lives. What begins in the service: the praise, the prayers, the Word, and the sacraments, is carried with us and permeates our lives wherever we go: our homes, the streets, the mall, or the hospital. When we experience that transforming love, the declaration that Jesus made to the Woman at the Well becomes fulfilled in our lives: “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”<sup>12</sup> That is, God is no longer just found in the temple or in a church service, but he is with us everywhere we go; and his love never departs from our lives. This is the relationship with Christ that we continually seek to offer to the people of our community.

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<sup>12</sup> John 4:23.



## CHAPTER TEN

### AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH

#### **Relationships**

Jesus Christ came specifically to reconcile us to God and to give us the power through relationship with him to reconcile with one another.<sup>1</sup> This highlights the role that relationship plays in our theology as something that is not only important or crucial, but the ultimate objective. Through the Incarnation, God has come to us in human flesh so that we might become his children. Children, “who were born not through blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God,” (John 1:13). Likewise, God longs for his children to be restored through him to one another. Jesus teaches that relationships are so important and part of our very being that we should be reconciled to one another before approaching God in worship.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising then, that the element of relationships is found throughout every other aspect of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry. It is found in the dinners, through serving and eating with one another. It is found within the teams through love and camaraderie. It is found in the worship as people draw near to the Holy God. It is found even in the clothing closet as the community helps one another find clothes that would fit and look good. It has been primarily through the strengthening of relationships in all of these areas that has enabled this ministry to be so successful. Through the relationships with one another and the community The Church of the Messiah has shifted from merely

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:18.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:24.

tolerating this ministry to embracing it as one of their core aspects of who we are in Christ.

In chapter seven I briefly described Letty Russell's image of the three tables of relationship: the round table, the kitchen table, and the Communion Table.<sup>3</sup> This image will be an effective tool to help us evaluate the ways in which relationships are taking place within the Fellowship Dinner Ministry. As previously written, these elements are interdependent upon one another and much of the evaluation concerning relationships via the Communion Table was discussed in the last chapter. There is one more story that I want to share, which demonstrates the small ways that people are gradually coming to God and the reality that this is a slow process.

During the month of December we forgo our normal worship books and replace them with one filled with Christmas carols.<sup>4</sup> This book is filled not only with the religious hymns like "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and "Silent Night," but contains secular songs like "Jingle Bells" and "Deck the Halls." When "Jingle Bells" was requested, I asked six-year-old C., if he would like to come up to the microphone and help me sing. Without hesitation he ran right up; I placed him on the stool; and with some nervousness he sang out and led us in this song. When the song was finished the room erupted in applause for C. The next week C. came up again to lead us in "Jingle Bells," which led to another girl who was then bold enough to lead us in "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." This serves as

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Brady, "Justice for the Poor in a Land of Plenty: A Place at the Table," *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006): 353-4.

<sup>4</sup> WARNING: to all liturgical fundamentalists reading this section, Christmas carols are being sung during the season of Advent. Please proceed with caution.

an example of small, but important ways that we are welcoming people to the “Communion table.” Each of these children, and their parents, were filled with great joy and pride for the part they played in the service. There was no dramatic sudden conversion that took place, but it has led to many who witnessed that event slowly beginning to embrace the worship service, to open themselves up to trusting me, which hopefully will then result in them coming to trust in the living God.

The second table that is presented is the kitchen table. The kitchen table is meant to reflect daily life: warmth, hospitality, and sharing. This is the table where we sit with one another, eat with one another, and get to know one another. The evaluation of this table signals a shift where throughout the remainder of the chapter we begin to look not only at results within the Fellowship Dinner ministry, but also to how this ministry has impacted the transformation of the parish as a whole over the past six years.

It is through the kitchen table where transformation begins. It begins simply, but powerfully through coming to know each others’ names. This cannot be overstressed. There is a reason that Jesus asks the name of the demon who possessed the man in the Gerasenes.<sup>5</sup> There is power in knowing that name; power to call that demon out. Likewise, there is power in relationships when we know the names of the people we are serving, the people on our teams, the people to whom we minister. This has been one of the comments made most often from team members to how this ministry has impacted them spiritually: they have moved from a place where they were serving food to serving people. And they began to care about these people. When we begin to know each other,

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 5:1-20.

when we can address one another by name in the streets or in WalMart, there is a powerful bond that occurs in our lives. For me, when I know someone's name there is also a confidence to approach them, to pick up on our last conversation, to continue the story of our relationship. Throughout this publication I have used initials in order to protect anonymity, and will continue to do so when discussing specific situations, but I care deeply for Pearl, Jim, Brenda, Jeff, Samantha, Crystal, Rocky, Cindy, Kathy, Marty, Mark, and Megan.<sup>6</sup> Beginning to develop relationships at the kitchen table starts with knowing who is sitting across from you.

One of the other transformative kitchen table occurrences happens at the Sunday morning Coffee Hour. Before the transition some had complained that the noontime meal prevented fellowship from taking place within parish after the ten o'clock service. I must confess, this was not high on my reasons for making this transition, but it has turned out to be a wonderful benefit. Like many of the other relational aspects of this ministry, it was a few years before a sizeable number of the parishioners joined each other around the same round tables: drank coffee, ate pastries, and shared their lives with one another at the Coffee Hour. This has been vital for us as a parish, and has had a cyclical effect throughout all of our ministries, including the Fellowship Dinner. When we have our relational needs met, we are able to reach out in love, which blesses us and encourages us in our relationships with one another. This helps to increase our trust and open ourselves to have our relational needs further met. The cycle then repeats again and again. Over the past six years our parish has grown greatly in our relationships with one another. This is

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<sup>6</sup> This is obviously not an exhaustive list, but a mere fraction of the people to whom I love and minister.

not due solely to the Fellowship Dinner or Coffee Hour, but each of these plays a large role as we meet each other at the kitchen table.

It would also be a mistake not to mention that over the past few years, several of our Fellowship Dinner parishioners attend on Sunday mornings. They join us for Coffee Hour; and the congregation is warm and welcoming. We have kids who have started coming to Sunday School, and one boy serves as an acolyte. This has created a wonderful connection with the entire parish, many of whom do not attend the Fellowship Dinner. The relationships are not only increasing, but they are not isolated to one only area of ministry within the church.

This leads us to the round table. Because Jesus Christ includes each and every one of us in his kingdom, true partnership takes place when we all hold a place at that table. Seeking to achieve a round table, even with just a limited sampling has been challenging. It is an area where we could certainly improve. In some areas we have done well: in inclusion, outreach, and some empowerment. Other areas, such as leadership development and discipleship, are lacking if we want to fully embody the round table ideal.

One of the areas where we have done quite well over the past several years is including the Fellowship Dinner parishioners in our combined parish events. We have had talent shows and family game nights where many from the Fellowship Dinner have participated. Each summer we have a parish picnic at a local park, and there is a great

turnout from those who attend Sunday evening. By far, we get the greatest attendance at the Super Bowl Party which we hold in the lounge every year. The room is packed with people from every service loudly cheering on whoever is playing against the team I want to win. This is partially because I make a push-up bet with one of the youth. Every time the opposing team scores the other has to do push-ups in relation to the score. They love to watch me do push-ups. I am a good sport unless the Pittsburgh Steelers are playing in the Super Bowl. I do not tolerate cheering against the Steelers. Of course, this means that they cheer all the louder. I suppose the only thing they like more than seeing me do push-ups, is watching me get fanatical over the Steelers.

We have also had some success in empowering those who attend the dinner through asking for their assistance. We do not assign chores, nor do we force anyone to help out at the dinner, but there are several people who are more than willing to help wipe tables, stack chairs, or take out the garbage. One of these individuals, M., was so helpful week after week that the church hired him as our cleaning person. This was not without challenges due to a variety of factors. We had to assure the pre-school that this person was not a predatory risk. The person used the storage shed to keep bottles, bikes that were being fixed up, and a plethora of other items depending on the season. By far the biggest challenge was to keep M. on scheduled tasks, for while he was effective with the jobs that he did, there was quite a bit of oversight required throughout the day.<sup>7</sup> M. was an

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<sup>7</sup> This problem is not unique to him. This has been true of every cleaning person we have had since I arrived at The Church of the Messiah (and every church I have been in before that).

employee for two years; and might still be had he not acquired full time work at a local department store.<sup>8</sup>

In order to effectively achieve the round table image we would need to improve our assimilation of people into discipleship and leadership roles. This may happen naturally over the course of time, as this is, as I have written, a slow process. Already we have had one person confirmed and another who has attended a weekday Bible Study. However, currently we have no one serving on a team, nor anyone in a leadership position like the Vestry. If we were to strive for this, it would take intentionality and investment on our part to accomplish these goals. There are rare people in the church who volunteer; period. There is a minimal likelihood that those who have been marginalized in society are going to presume that they are welcome to serve in any capacity without our permission and at our request. As in other matters referring to poverty alleviation, it is the responsibility of the strong to build up the weak. We can not to wait for them come to us and ask for help; we need to seek out those we feel are competent and qualified, come alongside them, encourage them, and raise them up. This will take investment. Investment of our time; our relationships; but mostly of our willingness to allow our worldview to be adjusted, which may stretch us further out of our comfort zone.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> We have had some success in contracting out odd-jobs to many others also, unfortunately we cannot do more.

<sup>9</sup> The Rev. Mike Wurschmidt, of the Shepherd's Heart Fellowship in Oakland, PA, recounted his discipleship program with a similar population. He told me that they started with one leader to five members; then went to one leader for every three member; and finally settled on five leaders for every three members being the ratio needed to effectively disciple the people to whom they were ministering. That is a huge investment.

There is little doubt in my mind that relationships within these components of serving the dinners, being on a leadership team, experiencing worship, and interacting with one another at a variety of church events has served as the single most important element that has helped transform who we are as a parish of loving citizens in the Kingdom of God. Not only has our fellowship increased with one another; and our compassion for the stranger and broken multiplied; we have been transformed into a people who are outwardly focused. The Fellowship Dinner has allowed us to see that we can grow in fellowship and relationship with one another through reaching out into the community around us, as opposed to building walls and keeping the world at bay.

### **Evangelism**

I have previously written about the ways in which we share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who come to the Fellowship Dinner through the worship, as well as in all of the pastoral care that surrounds this ministry. This covered a good bit of the element of evangelism that takes place within the ministry; however, just as our relationships could not be confined within the Fellowship Dinner ministry, neither could our evangelism. Because of the ways in which so many of our parishioners lives have been transformed and touched through this ministry, God has continued to give us the vision and confidence to continue serving the community in other meaningful ways. I want to share three of these examples: our Houses of Blessing project, the Street Faire, and Montcalm Mania Vacation Bible School. Each of these projects involved a large investment of time, resources, and money.



The Houses of Blessing was initially a Lenten project in 2009.<sup>10</sup> In the city of Glens Falls there are several strong charitable organizations that are houses and we made the decision to sponsor six of these houses during the season of Lent.<sup>11</sup> Each Sunday a representative for one of the houses would come and share their mission and the ways in which we could act in partnership with them. Leading up to Easter we collected tangible household items requested by each house. We collected offerings and with all of the financial contributions, we purchased gift cards from businesses chosen by each house. The response was incredible.

The week after Easter I had the opportunity to deliver all of the items we collected along with the gift cards that were purchased to the various houses that we supported. It was an honor to witness the gratitude of each house, as well as their shock for the generosity of our parish.<sup>12</sup> In addition to dropping off and distributing these items, I was given a tour of each house. It was a joy and blessing to get to see how the operation and mission of each house worked. It was a wonderful opportunity to interact and develop relationships with leaders in the community. Many of the clients of those houses also attended the Fellowship Dinner. The director of one the house has come and served at the Fellowship Dinner a few times; and if one were looking only at measurable benefits that we received in return that this may have been the only one. Thankfully, no one is.

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<sup>10</sup> Also in 2011.

<sup>11</sup> The six houses were: Amanda's House, a place for families to stay while loved ones are being treated at Glens Falls Hospital; St. Joseph's House of Grace, a peaceful setting of comfort for those who are dying; The WAIT House, a residence providing support to homeless and at risk youth; the CARE House, which provides a safe place to advocate for the needs of children; the Domestic Violence Safe House, which provides a safe haven for those suffering abuse; and the Adirondack Vet's House, providing a temporary, supportive environment to homeless veterans.

<sup>12</sup> Each house received several boxes of brand new items and \$870 in gift cards. This figure more than doubled any of our previous Lenten giving projects.

Through this project the monies and items provided many benefits to those in need; however, the greater benefit was taking place in the lives of many of the people of The Church of the Messiah who were finding a great joy in giving.

The Houses of Blessing served primarily as an example of the ways in which transformation was taking place in the spiritual hearts of people; and how that transformation was impacting the vision and mission of The Church of the Messiah. The following two examples describe outreach events that actively involved our parish reaching out into the community. We held our first Street Faire on a Friday evening in early September of 2007. The vision for the Street Faire was to give thanks for the many blessings that God has given to The Church of the Messiah; and to share that thankfulness by demonstrating God's love and hospitality to our neighbors in the community. And to have fun. Keeping this vision in front of us was vital as we planned and later evaluated this event. We were not holding this event to gain members or increase stewardship; we were doing it out of thankfulness for all God had given us, and we wanted to share that joy with our neighbors.

Utilizing many of the tools of team leadership planning that we implemented in the Fellowship Dinner ministry, a group of nearly twenty began to plan an exciting outreach event. We provided food: hot dogs, ice cream, cotton candy, sno-cones, and popcorn. We set up carnival games with prizes. We had a bounce house, face painting, fire trucks, and police cars. Best of all, we had pony rides.<sup>13</sup> All of this was free to the community. That night over three hundred people, reflecting the vast melting pot of our

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<sup>13</sup> I have a great picture of Deacon Nancy Goff riding a pony.

community, showed up in the parking lot next to the church to join in the festivities of the Street Faire. One little girl, after riding the ponies for the third time, exclaimed, “who knew church could be this much fun?” This event took a lot of planning, utilized many volunteers who invested themselves, and cost a substantial amount of money. But it has been an event that has been a blessing to our parish and the community. It has become an annual tradition that everyone looks forward to each year.<sup>14</sup> In demonstrating our thankfulness, we created an event which welcomed and invited every person in our community, regardless of who they were, and brought them together in one place, simply for the purpose of having fun and enjoying themselves.

For the first three years the Street Faire was primarily a community outreach celebration, but for the past two years it has also served as the finale for our Montcalm Mania Vacation Bible School, our final example. For several years we had offered the traditional Vacation Bible School during a week in the summer at the church with varying degrees of success, but two years ago we decided to forgo that model and take our VBS on the road.<sup>15</sup> Rather than expect kids to come to us, we would go to them.

The Montcalm Street Playground was a few blocks from our church, right in the middle of the one of the neighborhoods from where many who were wrestling with the issues of poverty resided, and looked to have the perfect set-up for holding a Vacation Bible School. There was a field for games, a pavilion with picnic benches for craft and snacks, and best of all this was a site for a city-sponsored “free lunch” program for youth.

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<sup>14</sup> This is even truer now, as in the past three years I have sat in a “dunk tank” during the Street Faire.

<sup>15</sup> We did this also as a mission project for a small church in the Adirondacks, so we had some practice at this.

After gaining permission from the city, we spoke with the director of the lunch program and scheduled our Bible School to lead directly into the lunches. It was our hope to attract the kids already attending the lunches and get them to come earlier, and also draw many others to come to both the VBS and the lunch.<sup>16</sup> The week before Montcalm Mania was set to begin, a couple of us went to the playground during the lunch, met and talked with the kids, distributed flyers, and made some crafts left over from previous Bible Schools.<sup>17</sup>

Every day during the Montcalm Mania week, a team would gather at the church; load up the back of my pick-up truck with that day's supplies, and caravan over to the playground. The week started off slowly, with most of the kids not showing up until the lunch, but by the end of the week there was a gang of kids waiting for us at the playground to help set up.<sup>18</sup> Over forty kids came out that first summer, for many this was their first exposure to God, to Jesus, to the fact that they are deeply and unquestionably loved. The children learned about God's love for them through Jesus' teachings in the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan and the Friend at Midnight – each story a celebration of being found and loved by God. That message was reinforced while doing crafts, playing games, enjoying snacks and music. The week ended with a water balloon battle in the middle of the park, and an invitation to join us at the Street Faire. Nearly all of the kids and their parents came out to

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<sup>16</sup> This was also the director's hope, as the sustainability of the program depended on numbers of lunches served.

<sup>17</sup> This was perhaps our greatest move; we had kids lining up to come and make slime, which built up the excitement leading into the next week.

<sup>18</sup> Another important decision we made was to stay every day until after lunch was finished and provide crafts for the kids that just showed up for the lunchtime.

the Street Faire. It was such a powerful experience for our church that we did it again the following year.<sup>19</sup>

These are just three examples of the many ways that The Church of the Messiah has come to view outreach into the community as a part of the vision into which God is calling us. This has had a tremendous impact on the parish and carries over into all other areas of our life and ministry with one another. As we discuss all new projects, no longer are the first questions about money or the amount of effort something will take.<sup>20</sup> Instead, we discuss whether this fits into the vision that God has for us.

In a recent discussion concerning the Fellowship Dinner Ministry process, one parishioner commented, “this church has gone from having a Spirit of Poverty to a Spirit of Generosity.” This is an excellent description of the transformation that has occurred over the past six years. This generosity does not only refer to investing in outreach programs, like the Fellowship Dinner, but in recognizing these as essential components of our parish life. God has called us to be witnesses for his love and grace in the community, and this has been embraced in the lives of the parishioners at The Church of the Messiah. A recent survey shows that not only do the parishioners realize the importance of the Fellowship Dinner Ministry and give generously to support it, (Figure 10.1) but see this as a vital to our spiritual health and fulfilling our vision (Figure 10.2).<sup>21</sup> It would be easy

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<sup>19</sup> This year many of the kids who came to Montcalm Mania did not just attend the Street Faire, they helped with the set-up and to run the carnival games.

<sup>20</sup> These questions are not neglected, they just are not first.

<sup>21</sup> One interesting result of this survey is that there was the number of those who felt the Worship Service was very important for the Spiritual Health and Vision of Messiah was one greater than the number who felt that it was very important for the Community. This signifies that at least one person sees that it is more important for us to provide an opportunity for the community to worship than for them to attend.

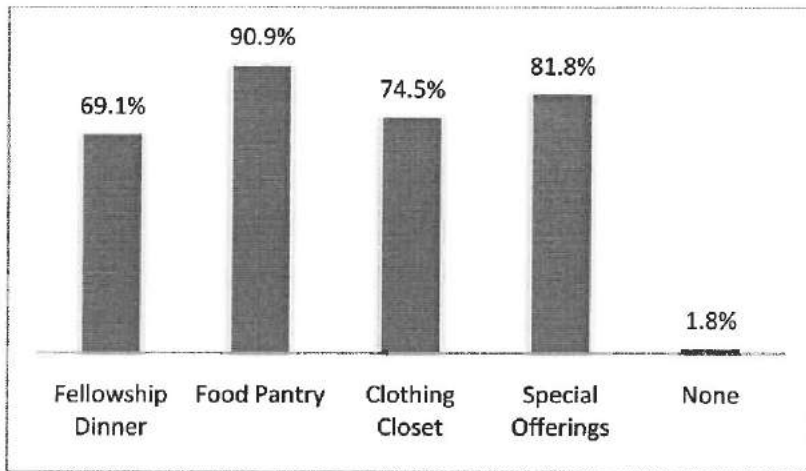


Figure 10.1. Percentage of Donations to Fellowship Dinner Ministry of Those Surveyed.

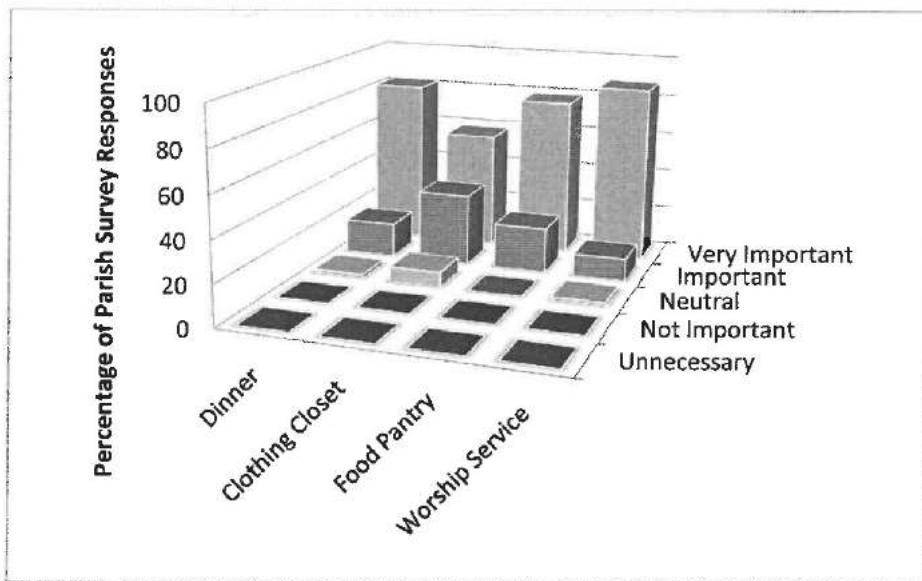


Figure 10.2. Importance of Fellowship Dinner to the Vision and Spiritual Health of Messiah.

to compartmentalize the Fellowship Dinner as an outreach program and separate it from all other aspects of our parish life. Instead, The Church of the Messiah has chosen to seek their identity from this ministry and see this as an essential component for our spiritual well-being. We have chosen to sacrifice our comfort, share our resources, and enter into

relationships in order to demonstrate love for our neighbor; and to proclaim the glory and grace of God.

As we look to the future I pray that we will continue to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,” (Hebrews 12:1b-2a) for it is through Christ alone that we will gain our strength and vision for the days and years to come.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### REMAINING IN THE VINE

Looking back over the past six years it is staggering to reflect on the change and transformation that has occurred. This was a ministry that was about to take its last breath, when God breathed new life into it. He obviously held nothing back. It is remarkable to think about the number of meals that we have served,<sup>1</sup> the amount of food that we have distributed through the food pantry,<sup>2</sup> and the sheer volume of clothes that we have provided through the clothing closet.<sup>3</sup> This does not even begin to address the many ways that God is touching lives at the worship service and the countless number of relationships that are taking place through the grace of Jesus Christ. We have a God of restoration and resurrection, and this ministry is living proof.

That this ministry outperformed all of our expectations makes it difficult to evaluate how it might improve. We currently have eight teams that rotate through a yearly schedule to make sure that every meal, every Sunday is prepared and served. In six years we have never had a team fail to perform this task; never had a team fail to show up<sup>4</sup>; never even have a team back out at the last second and switch with another team.<sup>5</sup> Equally amazing is that these have been the same teams aside from slight fluctuation in membership and leadership within the teams. There are few healthy ministries that I have

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<sup>1</sup> 27,768 in the past six years, which does not count me sneaking back in the kitchen for seconds.

<sup>2</sup> 3167 bags filled with five or six items over the past three years.

<sup>3</sup> I could not even begin to guess.

<sup>4</sup> Even in blizzard conditions.

<sup>5</sup> The closest I ever got to being nervous about a team not coming was when the Scout troop all prepared their chili at home, so they did not need to arrive until 5:30. The irony is this was one of the original goals to make serving easier, but it happened so rarely that when it did occur I was not prepared.



encountered that have remained so consistent and strong for this period of time. During this same period we have had six different Sunday School coordinators.

Most of the improvements that have been suggested recently are only minor tweaks here and there. Many think that we are exactly where we should be within this ministry. They perceive that a healthy balance has been achieved between meeting the needs of the community and the needs of the parish. If we start to tip too far in one direction or the other it would begin to disrupt that balance. We have worked hard to achieve this goal and we certainly do not want to disrupt it without good reason.

There were a couple of good suggestions that would not create additional weight. One was launching a campaign of directly inviting people to join us at the dinner, specifically targeting the senior citizen population in our area.<sup>6</sup> In the present economy there are many in the community who could use a free meal, certainly senior citizens on a fixed budget. This would not cause a tremendous hardship, as it is as easy to cook for one hundred as it is for seventy; and normally we prepare as if one hundred will show up, so there are leftovers with which to contend. Another suggestion was to partner with other organizations who could utilize Schuyler Hall during the week to provide a central place for education about the resources and opportunities they provide. This would take some effort to organize and coordinate with interested organizations, but it would provide a valuable service without adding much to the present load of our teams and leadership. Both of these ideas could enhance the ministry and offer some additional poverty help and support to our community, without causing much of a strain on the present ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> There are three senior citizen hi-rises within four blocks of the church.

It has been said that when making future goals we often overestimate how much we can accomplish in one year, and underestimate what we can achieve in three to five years. The Fellowship Dinner ministry is living proof of that testimony and while I am uncertain how much further this ministry will develop, I am confident that The Church of the Messiah will continue to reach out into the community with new ministries such as the Montcalm Mania Vacation Bible School. To that end, I am proposing two goals of which I would like to develop interest over the next three to five years: moving deeper into the issues of poverty alleviation and creating a series of financial tools.

When I asked one of the original leadership team members, how she saw the Fellowship Dinner addressing the issues of poverty in our community, she replied, “well, we really are not doing much are we? The main problems that come with poverty: unemployment, unaffordable housing, and the lack of healthcare still exist, but we are doing what we can.” This is true; we are doing what we can. We are treating the symptoms of poverty as they come through our door; but the sickness rages on. I would like to work with other organizations, government agencies, and individuals to begin addressing the root causes of poverty. A former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, The Most Rev. Edmond Browning, once wrote, “We not only reach into the river of despair and rescue people who are drowning, we also move upstream to see who is

throwing them in!”<sup>7</sup> It is time to move upstream, and I hope that great progress will be made in addressing the core issues of poverty over the next three to five years.

I am quite interested in the financial tools that are being utilized to help empower people and alleviate poverty worldwide. I am impressed by the microfinance loan market that is helping many people invest and reinvest in their businesses. Already one of our parish goals is to have funded 100 loans by the end of 2011 on our Church of the Messiah team through Kiva,<sup>8</sup> an online company that connects individuals with lenders in order to help fund microfinance loans. I am also interested in creating a Rotating Savings and Credit Association (RoSCA),<sup>9</sup> which is creative way to save with a small group of committed individuals; and investigating the underutilized Individual Development Account (IDA) program,<sup>10</sup> which is a matching savings program for lower-income persons saving for a specific purpose like a new home or starting a new business.<sup>11</sup> I do not have a clear sense of how these financial tools or programs might be or how they will fit into the vision of the parish. I only know that the Lord has planted this seed of desire within me, and I pray that he will bring it to fruition.

As this writing comes to an end, I would like to offer both a caution and an encouragement. When I am asked about this ministry, invariably the response is

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<sup>7</sup> Episcopal News Service, "Report of the Presiding Bishop and Executive Council to the 70th General Convention," news release, June 25, 1991, Episcopal Archives, [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress\\_release.pl?pr\\_number=91169](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=91169). (Accessed January 11, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.kiva.org/team/church\\_of\\_the\\_messiah\\_glens\\_falls\\_ny](http://www.kiva.org/team/church_of_the_messiah_glens_falls_ny) (Accessed January 20, 2012). We currently have eighty-six, so maybe I should expand that goal.

<sup>9</sup> Daryl Collins et al., *Portfolios of the Poor How the World's Poor Live on \$2 a Day* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 116-128.

<sup>10</sup> Collins, *Portfolios of the Poor*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Presently, the nearest participating agency is nearly sixty miles away in Albany, NY.

something to the effect of, “I wish my church had a program like this.” This comment generally means one of two things. Either the person is saying that their church is not capable of doing this kind of ministry, because they are lacking the resources; or they are saying that they want their church to have this ministry, in its present form, without any of the foundational hard work of praying, planning, and implementing specific plans and goals that have been created and achieved. Those who are implying the second response are often not looking for a blueprint for how to create such a ministry; they want a photocopy of exactly what we are doing to address the issues of poverty to be put into place in their community, by their church, immediately. This leads to the caution: please do not read the preceding chapters as if they were a chemical formula for creating a Fellowship Dinner ministry. This will most likely lead to failure. It will not fail because of a misreading or misapplication, but simply due to the reality that not only does God call us to something; but the something to which he calls us.

This leads to the encouragement, for those who deem their congregations, communities, or organizations unable to build a ministry like the Fellowship Dinner ministry. God calls us each to something. If we are willing to lay aside our preconceived desires and our egos, the Lord responds. When we pray and listen, especially as a community of faith, God is faithful to lead us into the vision he has for us. This could be an afterschool program; it could be a ministry to those in prisons; it could be a ministry to those dealing with aging parents; it could be anything. What is important is that it is the thing to which God calls us. This is where the blessing emerges; embracing the path that the Lord has given us to follow.

Finally, the issues of poverty can be overwhelming. There is a tendency to become depressed and distressed about the vastness of this problem. There exists the danger of throwing up our hands in defeat and saying this issue is too big for us to handle. There is the temptation to let others, who we see as having far greater resources, step in to develop a solution for eradicating poverty. Unfortunately, due to the sin of the world, there will be no perfect solution until the return of Christ; the poor will always be in our land.<sup>12</sup> For some this will lead to even greater distress, but for those who put their hope in the Lord this brings freedom. We are not called to save the world from sin and poverty; that is the role of Christ our Savior. We are called simply to be obedient to the commands that we have been given: to love our neighbor; to care for the oppressed; to stretch out our hands to the poor. We are not called to do everything. We are called to do something. And apart from Christ we can do nothing.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 15:11.

<sup>13</sup> John 15:5.

## APPENDIX 1

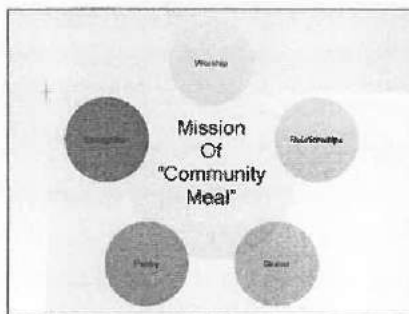
### CASTING THE VISION

This appendix contains the Power Point slides that were used at the parish-wide informational meeting to present and lay out the vision of The Fellowship Dinner Ministry. We highlighted the various components of the vision; and the importance of outside group participation and team leadership.

## Fellowship Dinner Ministry

## Mission

- To bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of our community by meeting both their spiritual needs, through transforming worship, and their physical needs with the provision of a meal, extra food, and clothing.



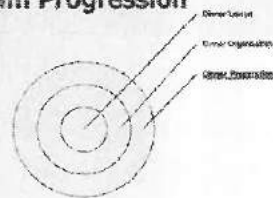
## Fellowship Dinner Teams

Team 1	Team 2
Team 3	Team 4
Team 5	Team 6
Team 7	Team 8

## Team Progression



## Team Progression



### Dinner Preparation

- Team plans meal
- Team prepares meal—presently at Messiah
- Team serves meal
- Team cleans up meal

### Team Progression



### Dinner Organization

- Team Plans Meal
- Team and others prepare meal (anywhere)
- Team (and others) serve meal
- Team (and others) clean up meal
- Team leader records "others" involvement—this helps us track who has been helping

### Team Progression



### Dinner Liaison

- An outside team plans and prepares the meal
  - Team provides outside team with assistance—around the kitchen
  - Team helps serve and clean
  - Team is present
- (In case of emergency—team prepares back-up food—not dogs eat, etc.)

### Scheduling

- The teams will be scheduled every 8 weeks
- Teams will always know when their turn will be
- Teams are responsible for switching with other teams, and then notify the team coordinator
- Monthly updates will be distributed to notify teams if outside groups are scheduled to prepare the dinner





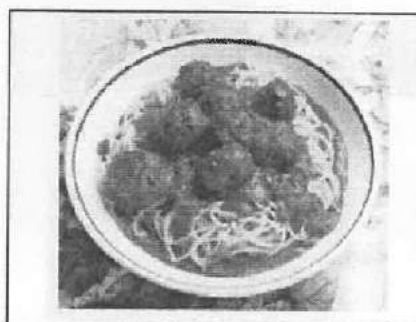
Date	Team	Outside Group
Jan 1	1	
Jan 8	2	Quakers
Jan 15	3	St. Peter's
Jan 22	4	
Jan 29	5	St. Peter's Church
Feb 5	5	St. Peter's
Feb 12	2	
Feb 19	3	St. George's
Feb 26	1	St. Peter's
Mar 5	2	
Mar 12	3	Team 1
Mar 19	4	St. George's
Mar 26	5	

### Worship

- Greeter
- Reader
- LFM
- Lead Prayers

### Meal Planning

- Teams are responsible
- Simplicity/Recipes
- Perfect your meal
- Using the congregation
- What do you need?



### Paying for Meals

- Donations
- Reimbursement (menu must be approved)
- Contact Kitchen Coordinator 3 wks in advance (meat only)

### Preparation

- Meals may be prepared off-site
- Meals (or portions of meals) may be prepared by non-team members
- Use parishioners, relatives, neighbors, etc.
- Invite them to come and help serve with you



### Miscellaneous

- Recruit continuously
- Involve as many different people as possible
- Kitchen coordinator will keep emergency rations stocked; please let her know if some have been used—same with paper and plastic products
- You are not alone—someone will be there to help

**Thank You**

+ köszönöm תודה *dekuji*

mahalo 고맙습니다

*thank you*

merci 谢谢 *danke*

Ευχαριστώ شكرا

どうもありがとう *gracias*

## APPENDIX 2

### LOG SHEET

This log sheet was developed to help us keep track of teams, meals that were being served, the number of meals that were served, and any other conditions that might help us plan for future Fellowship Dinners and anticipate trends.

FELLOWSHIP DINNER LOG SHEET	
DATE OF MEAL _____	WEATHER _____
TEAM COOKING _____	
CREW SERVING _____	
_____	
_____	
NUMBER OF PEOPLE SERVED _____	
NUMBER OF SECONDS _____	
WAS THERE ENOUGH _____	
MENU _____	
_____	
_____	
INGREDIENTS USED IN PREPARATION AND HOW MUCH OF EACH	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
PROBLEMS/COMMENTS	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	

## APPENDIX 3

### DOOR HANGERS

These door hangers were distributed around Glens Falls leading up to the launch of moving the Fellowship Dinner to the evening. Since that time, they have been occasionally been distributed when we collect food for the Food Pantry to inform the community of our mission and vision.

## Sunday Evening

### WORSHIP DINNER FELLOWSHIP

The Church of the Messiah invites you and your family to join us for worship at 5 PM and to dine with us at our Fellowship Dinner each Sunday evening at 6 PM. Come join us for an evening of prayer, food, and fellowship. No Cost



296 Glen Street Phone: 518.792.1560

## Worship

Worship begins in the church at 5 PM. Come and hear the Good News of God's Love proclaimed. Experience that love through music, prayer, healing, and anointing.

## Dinner

The Fellowship Dinner begins following the worship service at 6 PM each Sunday in the Parish House across from the Church. There is no cost for this dinner. Extra groceries are also available from the food pantry.

## Fellowship

Enjoy spending time with friends and your community. Develop new relationships and enjoy an evening surrounded by the love of God. Children and Families are welcome.

## Sunday Services

8 & 10:30 AM and 5 PM  
296 Glen Street Phone: 518.792.1560

## APPENDIX 4

### BROCHURES

Tri-fold brochures were created to distribute to churches and other organizations. These brochures present the history and vision of the ministry. They also offer an invitation to outside groups to become partners with The Church of the Messiah through a variety of ways in helping to feed the hungry.



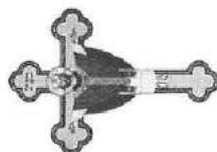
**Sunday Evening Schedule**  
5 PM Worship Service  
6 PM Fellowship Dinner



"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me... I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"

Matthew 25:34-41

## Fellowship Dinner Ministry



### The Church of the Messiah

296 Glen St.  
Glen Falls, NY 12801

Phone: 518-792-1560  
E-mail: [mesiah@ayyep.rr.com](mailto:mesiah@ayyep.rr.com)  
Web: [mesiah.org](http://mesiah.org)



Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall never hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."  
—John 6:35

296 Glen St.  
Glen Falls, NY 12801  
518.792.1560

## History

Working cooperatively with the Open Door Mission and Salvation Army to ensure that anyone could get a meal in Glens Falls everyday of the week, The Church of the Messiah has served a meal each Sunday for over a decade.

Originally the hope was that other churches and organizations from the area would join us in this ministry; however, having a meal at noon made this logistically difficult. A couple of years ago the people of Messiah began praying about this ministry— and discerned that the best way to accomplish our mission was to have an evening meal, and to create an evening service to allow for a spiritual feeding as well.



## The Vision

To bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of our community by meeting both their spiritual and physical needs.



### Spiritual Needs through Transforming Worship:

- \* Proclaiming the Good News of God's Love
- \* Music and Prayer
- \* Opportunity for Healing and Anointing

### Physical Needs:

- \* Providing a Nutritious Sunday Evening Meal
- \* Providing Extra Food through our Food Pantry
- \* Providing Seasonal Clothing

## The Invitation

To join us in our mission of feeding the less fortunate of our community through any of the following ways:

- ❖ Preparing a meal for the Fellowship Dinner that feeds about 100
- ❖ Coming to Help Cook or Serve for the Fellowship Dinner
- ❖ Participating in the Sunday Evening Worship Service



Thank you for considering this important ministry opportunity. We'd love to see your Church, Organization, Mission Group, Youth Group, or other ministry join us Sunday evening at Messiah.

518.792.1560  
for more info

## APPENDIX 5

### YEARLY CALENDAR

A yearly calendar was created for the teams to demonstrate well in advance exactly when they would be cooking throughout the year. We had eight cooking teams, which rotated every other month; and the Choir, which cooked on any fifth Sunday. This created a very simple schedule, for example if a team cooked on the second Sunday of January, they would cook on the second Sunday of every odd month throughout the year. This calendar enabled the teams to be responsible for substituting with one another if any conflicts arose. The blank spaces next to the team names are to schedule the outside groups, which would replace that team's responsibility for cooking the meal, although a member of the team would still be a liaison for the outside group.



2007 Fellowship Dinner Calendar

January	
7	Youth
14	John Goff
21	Carol
28	Lake Luzerne

February	
4	June (Super Bowl)
11	John Gallagher
18	Marge
25	Faith

March	
4	Youth
11	John Goff
18	Carol
25	Lake Luzerne 1st Presby.

April	
1	June
8	John Gallagher
15	Marge
22	Faith
29	Choir

May	
6	Youth
13	John Goff
20	Carol
27	Lake Luzerne

June	
3	June
10	John Gallagher
17	Marge
24	Nancy

July	
1	Youth
8	John Goff
15	Carol
22	Lake Luzerne
29	Choir

August	
5	June
12	John Gallagher
19	Marge
26	Nancy

September	
2	Youth
9	John Goff
16	Carol
23	Lake Luzerne
30	Choir

October	
7	June
14	John Gallagher
21	Marge
28	Nancy

November	
4	Youth
11	John Goff
18	Carol
25	Lake Luzerne

December	
2	June
9	John Gallagher
16	Marge
23	Nancy
30	Choir

## APPENDIX 6

### VISITING TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

The following resource is a document that we give to the visiting teams before they come to serve the Fellowship Dinner. This will give them a detailed overview of the expectations concerning meals and set up, as well as answer many of the questions that teams may have leading up to their date of service.

## Fellowship Dinner Visiting Team Information

1. Typical Meal
  - a. Main Course (you provide)
  - b. Salad &/or Vegetable (you provide)
  - c. Bread (optional - Panera's – just let us know to hold some for you)
  - d. Dessert (you provide)
  - e. Beverages
    1. 3-4 gallons Milk (you provide)
    2. Ice water
    3. Ice Tea/Juice
    4. Coffee/Tea
2. Recommend that there be at least 4-5 servers/preparers
  - a. Roll Silverware
  - b. Set up serving area
  - c. Prepare drinks
    1. Ice water
    2. Ice Tea/Juice (in pantry)
    3. Coffee/Tea (in pantry)
  - d. Prepare Meal
  - e. Serve Meal
  - f. Clean up
  - g. Fill out "Fellowship Dinner" Log
3. Church of the Messiah will provide the following.
  - a. Condiments
    1. Salt and Pepper
    2. Grated Cheese (if required)
    3. Catsup, mustard, mayonnaise etc.
    4. Coffee creamer
    5. Sugar, Sweet and Low
  - b. Coffee, Tea
  - c. Ice Tea Mix
  - d. Ice
4. Kitchen Operation – **A member of the Messiah Team will be here to help you with any questions**
  - a. Location of trays, silverware, plates, napkins, pitchers, bowls, cups, condiments, etc
  - b. Operation of Stove and Oven
  - c. Operation of Dish Washer
  - d. Location of "Fellowship Dinner" Log

If you have any questions please contact Becky in the Church Office 792-1560

## APPENDIX 7

### SAMPLE WORSHIP BULLETINS

The following documents are samples of the worship bulletins that were used at the Fellowship Dinner Ministry worship service while it was being held in the church. A balance between contemporary prayers and traditional liturgy was sought to make the transition smoother. The worship music was on a separate insert or found in the hymnals within the pews. Since moving the service to Schuyler Hall a spiral-bound worship booklet was created.

**Worship Team Prelude**

**Greeting and Welcome**

**Opening Worship Songs**

**Opening Prayers**

Minister: Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
People: And blessed be His kingdom, now and forever. Amen

**Phos Hilaron (Unison)**

O gracious light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the vesper light,

we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,

O Son of God, O Giver of Life,

and to be glorified through all the worlds.

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Minister: Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil, and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. Amen.

**Proclamation of the Word of God**

A reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:1-13

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew.

People: Glory to you, Lord Christ. (Matthew 21:28-32)

Minister: The Gospel of the Lord. People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Sermon:

Response to the Word

Fr. Scott Harding

**Prayer for the Church and the World**

That this evening may be holy, good, and peaceful,

*After each petition people respond: "We entrust you, O Lord."*

That your holy angels may lead us in paths of peace and goodwill,

That we may be pardoned and forgiven for our sins and offenses,

That there may be peace to your Church and to the whole world,

That we may depart this life in your faith and fear, and not be condemned before the great judgment seat of Christ,

That we may be bound together by your Holy Spirit in the communion of all your saints, entrusting one another and all our life to Christ,

*The Minister then says a concluding prayer.*

**The Lord's Prayer**—Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Offertory/Preparation of the Altar**

**Communion/Healing/Anointing**

**Post-Communion Prayer**

Gracious Father, we give you praise and thanks for this Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, the pledge of our redemption; and we pray that it may bring us forgiveness of our sins, strength in our weakness, and everlasting salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Blessing**

**Closing Worship Song**

**Dismissal**—People respond, "Thanks Be to God."

*Please join us for dinner across the street in the Parish Hall immediately following the service.*

**Worship Team Prelude**

**Greeting and Welcome**

**Opening Worship Songs**

**Opening Prayers**

*Minister:* Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
*People:* Blessed be His kingdom, now and forever.

**Magnificat (Unison)**

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

*Minister:* The Lord be with you.

*People:* And also with you.

*Minister:* Let us pray.

Almighty God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vesper light, and we implore you of your great mercy that, as you enfold us with the radiance of this light, so you would shine into our hearts the brightness of your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Proclamation of the Word of God**

A reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew.

*People:* Glory to you, Lord Christ. (Antiphon)

*Minister:* The Gospel of the Lord. *People:* Praise to you, Lord Christ

**Sermon:**

Fr. Scott Harding

**Response to the Word**

**Prayers for the Church and the World**

*Form IV, RCP 388*

*After each petition the people say, "Lord, hear our prayer."*

*The Minister then says a concluding prayer.*

**The Lord's Prayer.**—Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Offertory/Preparation of the Altar**

**Communion/Healing/Anointing**

**Post-Communion Prayer**

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Blessing**

**Closing Worship Song**

**Dismissal.**— *People respond, "Thanks Be to God."*

*Please join us for dinner across the street in the Parish Hall immediately following the service.*

## APPENDIX 8

### LECTIONARY OF BIBLE READINGS FOR WORSHIP SERVICE

This two-year lectionary was crafted to create an overview of some of the most important Bible stories, especially for those unfamiliar with the Bible.<sup>1</sup> These passages are primarily stories and parables that can be unpacked with cultural details or background that sets the scene and context for the event taking place. For many, who have no religious or biblical background these stories have provided a good starting point for introducing and expounding upon the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> I got this idea from Whitney T. Kuniholm, *The Essential Bible Guide: 100 Readings through the World's Most Important Book* (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2003), but altered it to fit my own environment.

## The Lectionary for Essential Bible Readings

### YEAR 1

	Story	Readings
I Advent	Zechariah	Luke 1:5-25
II Advent	Angel appears to Mary	Luke 1:26-38
III Advent	John the Baptist	John 1:19-34
IV Advent	Nativity	Luke 2:1-20
I Christmas	Presentation of Jesus	Luke 2:21-40
II Christmas	The Visit from the Magi	Matthew 2:1-12
I Epiphany	The Flood and God's Covenant	Genesis 9:8-17
II Epiphany	Woman at the Well	John 4: 4-42
III Epiphany	Mary & Martha	Luke 10:38-42
IV Epiphany	Jesus Raises Lazarus	John 11:17-44
V Epiphany	Joshua Renews the Covenant	Joshua 24:14-27
VI Epiphany	Gideon	Judges 6-7
VII Epiphany	Samson	Judges 13-16
VIII Epiphany	Josiah and the Book of the Law	II Kings 22-23
Last Epiphany	Beginning of Jesus' Ministry	Luke 4:14-30
I Lent	Woman at Simon's House	Luke 7:36-50
II Lent	Jesus Cleanses the Temple	Mark 11:12-25
III Lent	Jesus Washes Disciples Feet	John 13:1-17
IV Lent	Last Supper	Luke 22:7-22
V Lent	Garden of Gethsemane	Matthew 26:36-46
Palm Sunday	Arrest/Crucifixion	Matthew 26:47- 27:56
Easter	Resurrection	Matthew 28:1-10
II Easter	Hiding in Fear	John 20:19-31
III Easter	Lame Man at Temple Gate	Acts 3:1-11



	<b>Story</b>	<b>Readings</b>
IV Easter	Stephen	Acts 6-7
V Easter	Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25-37
VI Easter	Paul & The Jailer	Acts 16:16-34
VII Easter	Prodigal Sons	Luke 15:11-32
Pentecost	The Coming of the Holy Spirit	Acts 2:1-11
Proper 3 (May 25)	Jesus Raises Lazarus	John 11:17-44
Proper 4 (June 1)	Joshua Renews the Covenant	Joshua 24:14-27
Proper 5 (June 8)	Gideon	Judges 6-7
Proper 6 (June 15)	Samson	Judges 13-16
Proper 7 (June 22)	Josiah and the Book of the Law	II Kings 22-23
Proper 8 (June 29)	Sermon on the Mount	Matthew 5-7
Proper 9 (July 6)	Sending of the 12	Matthew 10:1-31
Proper 10 (July 13)	David & Goliath	I Samuel 17
Proper 11 (July 20)	David as King	II Samuel 6
Proper 12 (July 27)	Man Healed at Pool of Bethesda	John 5:1-15
Proper 13 (August 3)	Man Born Blind	John 9
Proper 14 (August 10)	Woman Caught in Sin	John 7:53-8:11
Proper 15 (August 17)	The Call & Covenant of Abraham	Genesis 12-15
Proper 16 (August 24)	Isaac's Birth and "Sacrifice"	Genesis 21-22
Proper 17 (August 31)	Unjust Steward	Luke 16:1-15
Proper 18 (September 7)	Kingdom of God	Matthew 13:31-34; 44-52
Proper 19 (September 14)	Jesus Walks on the Water	Matthew 14:22-36
Proper 20 (September 21)	Elijah and the Prophets of Baal	I Kings 18:16-39
Proper 21 (September 28)	Elisha and Naaman	II Kings 5:1-19
Proper 22 (October 5)	Healing of the Ten Lepers	Luke 17:11-19
Proper 23 (October 12)	Transfiguration/Confession of Peter	Matthew 16:13-17:13
Proper 24 (October 19)	The Rich Young Ruler	Luke 18:18-30

	<b>Story</b>	<b>Readings</b>
V Lent	Lost Sheep/ Coin	Luke 15:1-10
Palm Sunday	Triumphal Entry	Luke 19:28-44
Easter	Resurrection	Luke 24:1-12
II Easter	Great Commission	Matthew 28:16-20
III Easter	Phillip	Acts 8:26-40
IV Easter	Saul/ Paul Conversion	Acts 9:1-19
V Easter	Healing of the Paralytic	Mark 2:1-12
VI Easter	Barnabas	Acts 4:32-37
VII Easter	Friend at Midnight	Luke 11:1-13
Pentecost	Body of Christ/ Spiritual Gifts	I Corinthians 12
Proper 3 (May 25)	The Battle of Jericho	Joshua 5:13-6:20
Proper 4 (June 1)	Ruth	Ruth
Proper 5 (June 8)	Samuel	I Samuel 3
Per 6 (June 15)	Lord of the Sabbath	Matthew 12:1-14
Proper 7 (June 22)	Blind Man/Zacchaeus	Luke 18:35-19:10
Proper 8 (June 29)	Jacob and Esau I	Genesis 27:1-40
Proper 9 (July 6)	Jacob and Esau II	Genesis 32-33
Proper 10 (July 13)	Jesus Calms the Storm	Mark 4:35-41
Proper 11 (July 20)	Demoniac in Tomb	Mark 5:1-20
Proper 12 (July 27)	Jairus' Daughter/Unclean Woman	Mark 5:21-43
Proper 13 (August 3)	Feeding the 5000	Mark 6:30-44
Proper 14 (August 10)	Cost of Discipleship	Luke 9:57-62
Proper 15 (August 17)	Evil Tenants	Matthew 21:33-46
Proper 16 (August 24)	Unmerciful Servant	Matthew 18:21-35
Proper 17 (August 31)	Laborers in Vineyard	Matthew 20:1-16
Proper 18 (September 7)	Moses Early Years	Exodus 2
Proper 19 (September 14)	Burning Bush	Exodus 3-4

	<b>Story</b>	<b>Readings</b>
Proper 25 (October 26)	Pharisee & Tax Collector	Luke 18:9-14
Proper 26 (November 2)	Daniel	Daniel 6:1-28
Proper 27 (November 9)	Esther	Esther
Proper 28 (November 16)	Parable of the Talents	Matthew 25:14-30
Proper 29 (November 23)	The 10 Commandments/Golden Calf	Exodus 20, 32

## **YEAR 2**

I Advent	John the Baptist	Mark 1:1-8
II Advent	Mary Visits Elizabeth	Luke 1:39-56
III Advent	Angel appears to Joseph	Matthew 1:18-25
IV Advent	Nativity of Jesus	Luke 2:1-20
I Christmas	Flight to Egypt/ Holy Innocents	Matthew 2:13-23
II Christmas	Creation/Fall of Man	Genesis 1-3
I Epiphany	Baptism of Jesus	Matthew 3:13-17
II Epiphany	Rahab	Joshua 2
III Epiphany	Crossing the Jordan	Joshua 3
IV Epiphany	The Battle of Jericho	Joshua 5:13-6:20
V Epiphany	Ruth	Ruth
VI Epiphany	Samuel	I Samuel 3
VII Epiphany	Lord of the Sabbath	Matthew 12:1-14
VIII Epiphany	Blind Man/Zacchaeus	Luke 18:35-19:10
Last Epiphany	Elijah and the Small Voice	I Kings 19:9b-18
I Lent	Joseph Sold into Slavery	Genesis 37
II Lent	Joseph Rise & Fall	Genesis 39-41
III Lent	Joseph Reveals Himself	Genesis 42-45
IV Lent	Temptation of Jesus	Matthew 4:1-11

	<b>Story</b>	<b>Readings</b>
Proper 20 (September 21)	The Plagues	Exodus 7-11
Proper 21 (September 28)	Passover/ Exodus	Exodus 12-14
Proper 22 (October 5)	Widow's Offering	Luke 21:1-4
Proper 23 (October 12)	Unjust Judge/Persistent Widow	Luke 18:1-8
Proper 24 (October 19)	Jonah	Jonah
Proper 25 (October 26)	Fiery Furnace	Daniel 3:1-30
Proper 26 (November 2)	All Saints'	Revelation 7:9-17
Proper 27 (November 9)	Four Soils	Matthew 13:1-23
Proper 28 (November 16)	Water to Wine	John 2:1-11
Proper 29 (November 23)	Letters to Churches in Revelation	Revelation 2-3

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## VITA

Name: Scott M. Harding

Place of Birth: Rochester, New York

Date of Birth: June 26, 1971

### Education

**B.S. (Chemical Engineering)**, University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)

**M.Div.**, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry (Ambridge, PA)

**D.Min. (Revival and Reform)**, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary  
(Charlotte, NC)

Period of Studies: June 2005-May 2012

Expected Date of Graduation: May 2012



